Centre for Educational Research, School of Education

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Transformations in parenting:
New possibilities through peer-led interventions

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Dedication

For Leanne

I never feel alone knowing the love you have for me and our sons.

Acknowledgements

"The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born."

(United Nations Children's fund, 2007)

The overwhelming journey of undertaking this study was borne out of my personal experience of the 'imposter syndrome'. The feeling of fraudulence has certainly been with me in my many professional roles and I'm hoping it will now go away. However, in no place have I felt more of an imposter than in my attempt to parent and love my own children. It has been the most challenging but rewarding experience of my life. I hope that now this hurdle is overcome, I can stand with greater confidence both in professional contexts, and within my own family, and be viewed as even slightly credible.

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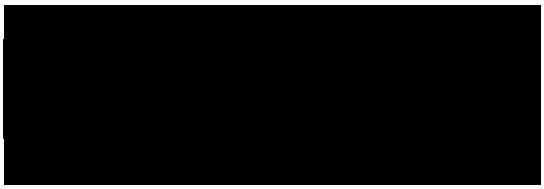
I am thankful for the gifts and opportunities my God has given me.

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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Copyright Statement

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List of Abbreviations

ACOSS:	Australian Council of Social Services
BAP:	Being a Parent Course
CFC:	Child and Family Centre
EPEC:	Empowering Parents Empowering Communities
NSW:	New South Wales
SPFI:	Australian Smart Population Foundation Initiative
UK:	United Kingdom
VCOSS:	Victorian Council of Social Services
VET:	Vocational Education and Training

Abstract

Parenting education is a core strategy adopted by many parent support services. The research literature is replete with varying degrees of evidence attesting to the effectiveness of a variety of parenting education interventions. Some recent literature questions the veracity of some of these claims and the nature of their supporting evidence. Despite this, professionally led parenting education interventions remain a dominant strategy in parent support services and have been widely disseminated. There is little research exploring the benefits and impact of alternative approaches that are collaborative and peer-led in the Australian context. The absence of research evidence about alternative approaches contributes to the hegemony of the traditional paradigm.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the experiences of parents who were participating in an innovative peer-led parenting intervention, specifically in communities characterised by disadvantage in Tasmania. Often, where situational disadvantage is compounded by inter-generational issues of unemployment and welfare dependency, family relationships are fragile and parenting is under pressure. It is important to consider how parents in such situations can be supported to develop confidence and skill in their parenting.

The primary question addressed through this research was *'What insights do the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting intervention provide for approaches to parenting education and the provision of parent support services?'*

In order to capture fine grained data about the issues and concerns of the participants, their interactions within the program and the program processes and impact, a qualitative methodology, informed by ethnographic perspectives was adopted for the research. This allowed the gathering of personal and contextual data that would contribute to addressing the research question. Thematic data analysis was undertaken through highly recursive processes of researcher immersion within the data and triangulation of data sources to verify emerging themes and interpretations. The following three sub questions emerged as important to addressing the overall question through this iterative process of data analysis:

- What are the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting program?
- In what ways do the experiences of parents' participation in a peer-led parenting intervention influence their parenting and their relationships?
- What insights can the parents' experiences provide for program designers, policy makers and service providers?

More broadly, this research aimed to contribute to an emerging body of knowledge about the changing nature of relationships between parents and professional workers resulting from parent and professionals working together in implementing parenting interventions. Furthermore, this study sought to investigate how the involvement of parents in the delivery of parent support services influence models of service provision.

The key conceptual frameworks that helped guide analysis in this study were Ecological Systems Theory, including bio-ecology, and this was complemented by a critical interpretivist perspective. Ecological Systems Theory helped account for the multiple influences experienced by parents and how these shape their behaviours. A critical perspective allowed for the examination and consideration of power relations evident in relationships between parents and professionals and how these influence the delivery of parenting interventions. Using new contemporary conceptual resources from the sociocultural literature, including Edwards' three 'gardening tools' of relational agency, common knowledge and relational expertise, contributed to producing a robust account and theorisation of relationships evident within the study.

The data from this study illuminates transformed relationships and practices between parents and professionals arising out of their shared involvement within a parent led parenting intervention. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for program designers, policy makers and service providers and challenge the effectiveness of current dominant approaches to Australian parenting education. A model of 'co-producing partnership', identified through this study, emerged through ongoing reflective learning relationships between parents and professionals enabling parenting skills and concepts to be understood, practiced, and successfully transferred to other contexts and relationships.

This thesis develops and proposes a model of practices between parents and professionals within parenting services that promotes 'co-producing partnership' evident at the practice intersections of the theoretical concepts of relational agency, reflective practice, and communities of practice.

Chapter One: Parent education as an intervention

> We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes and fears – programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. (Freire, 2005, p.96)

1.1 Introduction

Parenting education has been defined as an "organised programmatic effort to change or enhance the child-rearing knowledge and skills of a family system or a child care system" (Arcus, Schvanefeldt & Moss, 1993). In Australia, the area of parent education is predominantly characterised by the provision of manualised curriculum based programs, delivered by professionals. About one third of these parenting programs are supported by international evidence that show high competent and high fidelity implementation and demonstrated to be safe and effective (Wade et al., 2012). However, the majority continue to have limited supporting evidence (Barth & Liggett-Creel, 2014).

Parenting education is a core strategy of parenting focused services. However there are significant concerns about the enduring effects of parent support interventions for parent participants (Moran & Ghate, 2005; London Economics, 2007). Furthermore, parents who stand to benefit most from these services are least likely to interact with the services that provide them (Evangelou, Coxon, Sylva, Smith & Chan, 2013).

These issues warrant serious consideration in relation to reshaping and reconceptualising the provision of effective, accessible and relevant parenting services in Australia. Practitioners, policy makers and researchers are challenged to rethink the traditional models, processes and interventions intended to benefit parents and their children. This study presents an argument that more sustainable and effective approaches to redesigning parenting services could be facilitated through actively building authentic relationships between practitioners and parents characterised by co-design, respect, mutuality and reciprocity (Fox et al., 2015). Indeed, a growing body of literature reinforces the importance of dialogic engagement and co-authorship between community members and those

involved in service design and delivery. The outcome is the provision of services and products that are more relevant and accessible to consumers (Yip et al., 2016; Chan & Ritchie, 2016; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

1.2 Context of this study

In Australia, parents are conditioned into an expert led view of the service system even before their child's birth, through antenatal parenting education, and idealised messages about the "proper new mother" (Nichols, Nixon & Rowsell, 2009, p. 67). This even occurs in the form of bounty bags containing carefully marketed commercial and consumer products presented to new parents in hospital. The implications of this discourse places further pressure on the significant number of Australian parents (70%) who already feel pressured to "get parenting right" (Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005, p.10). This pressure is emblematic of a culture of top-down, prescriptive, expert led parenting instruction. It discounts what is known in relation to the benefits of authentic relationships between parents and workers, and how parents prefer to receive parenting advice.

Life can be extremely difficult for many families living in areas where situational disadvantage is compounded by inter-generational issues of unemployment and welfare dependency. In recent decades, well-intentioned policies of successive governments have done little to shift the 'wicked problems' (Australian Public Services Commission, 2007) that plague families, and negatively impact children's health and well-being. Governments have continued to fund and implement models and programs proven to work well in controlled testing contexts. These programs do not always achieve the same quality standards and success in localities where they are replicated (Coyne & Kwakkenbos, 2013). They should not be regarded as a panacea for addressing issues across multiple contexts, especially considering the complex issues many parents experience (La Placa & Corlyon, 2016).

It is known that parents initially turn to others in their network of family and friends for advice and support before accessing professional support (Ablewhite, Kendrick, Watson & Shaw, 2014). Some parents living in high poverty communities may choose social isolation as a survival strategy when their immediate networks are threatening or untrustworthy (Bess & Doykos, 2014). It is important to consider how parents in such situations can be helped to feel confident and skilled in their parenting.

The application of peer-led interventions in the provision of parenting education in Australia is a concept that merits research attention. The effectiveness of peer-led parenting education is untested in the Australian context and there is limited formal evidence of the benefits of para-professional and volunteer parenting interventions. However, Heath and Palm (2006) assert that it is vital for services to remain vigilant to the risks of inadvertently harming parents and their families when providing support and education.

The role of parents as facilitators in the provision of parenting education within services could be viewed, by some, as blurring boundaries between parents in need and professionals providing support. The lack of a robust evidence base, and the perceived power differential between qualified and non-qualified facilitation in parenting programs, provides a strong rationale for a qualitative study, constructed and delivered within a democratic framework, to critically explore this issue.

This study took place in Tasmania in communities targeted by the Tasmanian Government to implement integrated, early years focused, 'Child and Family Centres' (CFC). The twelve CFC communities targeted as areas of early childhood disadvantage or vulnerability were identified through an analysis of demographic data sources (Kids come first report, 2009). A parenting education intervention implemented in the Tasmanian CFC's, 'Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) was a parent led parenting intervention. This parent run and practitioner supported intervention, offered in CFC's, was the service context for this study.

1.3 Why do some parents appear service resistant?

Despite Australia's relative prosperity, many families continue to experience increasing disadvantage often leading to worsening outcomes for their children. Keating and Hertzman (1999) refer to this as 'modernity's paradox.' This dichotomy has given rise to political discourses like 'proportionate universalism' (Marmot, 2010) which argues the resourcing and provision of services must be proportionate to the level of need in a given area. For this to be possible, those who experience adversity must be able to advocate for themselves. Yet those experiencing the most disadvantage often have least access to mechanisms and resources that enable them to advocate within systems. Ironically, these same systems are responsible for the provision of preventative interventions to support parents to develop networks and resources that can provide appropriate advice and support (Byrnes & Miller,

2012). This is particularly pertinent in communities of high poverty where relational well-being is shown to be compromised (Bess & Doykos, 2014).

When supporting families who are overwhelmed by multiple needs, Australian services tend to address complex problems experienced by families in isolation (Katz et al., 2006) or focus on family deficits rather than building supportive structures and practices that engage families effectively (Slee, 2006). Responding to this problem, and the worsening developmental outcomes for an increasing number of children, successive Australian governments have implemented policies that focus on delivering integrated and collaborative service approaches. Examples include policy frameworks such as 'Keep Them Safe' (Government, NSW, 2009), 'Kids come first' (Kids come first report, 2009), and 'Closing the Gap' (Government, Australian, 2011). These policies have aimed to ameliorate the siloed and often disparate service system approaches experienced by governments and agencies (Niron, 2013). However, more needs to change in order for parenting services to engage effectively with families experiencing vulnerability.

It has been argued that the emergence of a globalized economy has placed emphasis on education of individuals and their subsequent productivity. This has contributed to the evolution of extended forms of education and in the context of service provision to parents, parenting education is one example (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). The current literature illuminates an argument that current neo-liberal political discourses have influenced the provision of contemporary approaches to parenting education, primarily positioning parents as responsible for reducing intergenerational disadvantage in families (La Placa & Corlyon, 2016). They posit that poverty and other complex circumstances weigh heavily on families experiencing disadvantage and caution against accepting neo-liberal over simplifications of these complex issues. La Placa and Corlyon's premise is that the complex nature of poverty demands service responses that go beyond fixing parenting problems (2016). They highlight that the difficulty many parents and practitioners experience in accessing and relating to each other further compounds the issues.

The situational, structural and relational barriers to the engagement of parents with services are complex and multilayered (Forrester et al., 2012; Gladstone et al., 2014). To effectively and authentically address such barriers requires sophisticated responses that move beyond the continued provision of interventions that are reflective of historical

expert led approaches. One concept that warrants serious consideration is the potential for local parents to work within the system, as co-workers alongside professionals, to facilitate a potentially empowering learning environment whereby practitioners and parents work with, and learn from each other. An approach to the provision of parenting education, co-delivered between professionals and parent facilitators, could help alter parents' perceptions of services and support the engagement of parents who previously found services difficult to access. This mode of parenting education would require professionals to work closely with parents in ways that are different to the traditional modes of parenting support.

In addition to the quality of relationships between practitioners and those they support, the family support sector in Australia is also being challenged to consider the role the traditional 'consumer' plays in the design and delivery of services. Despite the strong rationale proffered for reciprocally beneficial working relationships between consumers and services through the literature, the potential for the emergence of shared practices between parents and practitioners in the co-delivery of parent education interventions, is yet to be comprehensively illustrated. Hence, an examination of service contexts that enable parents to contribute to, and be partners in, the co-production of engaging parent support practices is warranted.

1.4 Aims of this study

The primary aim of this study was to examine the experiences of parents who participate in an innovative peer-led parenting intervention, specifically in communities characterised by disadvantage. More broadly, this research aims to help inform a small but emerging body of literature about relationships between parents and professionals arising out of parents and professionals working together through the provision of parenting interventions. Furthermore, this study sought to investigate how the involvement of parents in the delivery of parent support services influenced service provision.

It has been found that parents sometimes find it more helpful to receive advice from other parents (Ablewhite, 2015). This research provides insight into how services might capitalize on this knowledge in ensuring parents have access to the advice and support of other parents within the context of parent support services. The study identified the sometimes subtle but important characteristics of the relationships between professionals

and parents that enabled a democratic model of shared practice characterised by joint reflection and learning. These same reflective learning practices could also be replicated by parents in other social and parenting contexts.

1.5 Methodology and theoretical frameworks

This study is an ethnographically informed qualitative research project. At its foundation, it draws on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and critical theory (Freire, 2005; Agger, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1997), which has evolved over the past century through the work of a number of eminent thinkers. Both of these theoretical perspectives are complementary in shaping the study design, its implementation and the processes of analysis. Other theoretical frameworks are also employed to explore interpretations and findings emerging from the research.

1.6 Significance of this research

Whilst there is a plethora of literature relating to the application of parenting education as a service intervention, the research literature is largely silent in relation to engaging parents as facilitators of parenting education interventions in communities characterised by disadvantage. In Australia there exist other kinds of programs that include parents in their provision. Examples include the Community Mothers' Programme, a volunteer home visiting intervention developed in Ireland; NEWPIN, a centre based and outreach model developed in the UK; and the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program developed in the United States of America.

In order for parents to work alongside professionals in the facilitation of parenting education, significant attention needs to be given to enabling parents to transition from being service users to service 'contributors' (Scott, 2014). It also requires professionals to view parent facilitators as co-workers and practice partners. This notion challenges existing approaches to the delivery of parenting education and calls for a re-examination of current conceptualisations of the parent/professional relationship.

The literature identifies the existence of gaps between the rhetoric and the practice of 'partnership' (Pinkus, 2003). There has also been a lack of attention to power relations between service providers and service users in the research literature (Wong & Sumsion, 2013). Furthermore, the literature only illuminates superficial involvement of service users in models of 'co-production' (Wiewiora, Keast & Brown, 2015). Despite its regular use in

Australian policy and service provision, continued confusion exists around the concept of parent and community engagement (Moore, McDonald, McHugh-Dillon & West, 2016; Roose et al., 2012).

The concept of engaging groups of families commonly termed 'hard to reach' (Evangelou, Coxon, Sylva, Smith & Chan, 2013), has proved complex for Australian parenting services. This is particularly pertinent for services attempting to engage families who are already overwhelmed by multiple complex needs, and feeling subjugated by deficit discourses that influence professional workers perceptions of families (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). There is potential for such barriers that exist between parenting services and some groups of parents to be overcome through parents working in services. In so doing, parents may be able to straddle the boundary between parents and services, enhancing opportunities for engagement between professional workers and other service resistant parents. Some literatures have proposed concepts like 'gap-mending' (Chiapparini, 2016), 'boundary-spanning' (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), 'parent ambassador' (Avis, Bulman & Leighton, 2007) in attempts to describe the potential for consumers to bridge the void between consumers and the traditional provider of services. However, these concepts have not been formally applied in research related directly to engaging parents in interventions through service approaches that employ parents as service providers.

This study examines the experiences of parents who participated in a peer-led parenting intervention. It provides insight into what might help address the gaps and shortcomings experienced by parenting services in engaging with families who avoid contact with services. The study illuminates the boundary spanning (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) phenomenon that can occur between such parents and service providers, through interventions that are facilitated by parents in partnership with professionals.

Given the perceived risk to services in employing the less formal dyad of local parent facilitators, a requisite willingness at policy and governance levels must exist to move beyond the ostensibly safe modality of highly trained personnel delivering specialized expertise. It calls "…for a very different organisational structure where rules are set up to support relational engagement." (Edwards, 2010, p. 71) rather than suppressing opportunities for engagement, across groups of diverse abilities, through bureaucratized risk minimization. This thesis argues that authentically engaging service structures can be

supported through an active partnership between community members and practitioners in the delivery of a peer-led parenting intervention.

1.7 Outline of chapters - Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The following sections provide a brief summary of the focus of each chapter.

1.7.1 Chapter one

This chapter provides a summary overview of the study and the context in which it occurred. It positions the study within the scholarly field of parenting and highlights gaps in the wider literature. The chapter points to the absence of evidence in relation to the potential for parents to collaborate as partners alongside professionals in conceptualising new practices model that improve service engagement for families who previously found services difficult to access.

1.7.2 Chapter two

Chapter two explores conceptual and theoretical concepts in relation to parenting and issues encountered in current approaches to the provision of parent education interventions in mainstream service provision. The chapter identifies inadequacies in current deficit focused discourses related to parenting and how these are reflected and perpetuated in policies and interventions designed to assist parents.

Drawing from other disciplines, the chapter examines the potential for new conceptual frameworks of practice to be transferred to the parenting support domain that support the development of partnerships between professionals, the services they represent and the families who utilise them. It is argued in this chapter that such models should be characterised by parents and practitioners working together in reciprocally enriching models of reflective co-learning to engage other often disaffected families on the periphery of the service system.

1.7.3 Chapter three

The methodological framework for this research is explained in detail through this chapter. The notions of trust and integrity in research are explored as they are particularly salient considerations for this study given the social and environmental contexts in which the research took place. The chapter begins with a description of the research questions and

then details the various components that characterise the ethnographically informed methodology. The chapter provides a rationale for the qualitative research methodology and identifies the potential limitations of this study.

Given the demographic contexts in which this study occurred, and the potential power imbalance in the exchange between a white, male, middle-class researcher and females, parenting within sometimes complex personal situations, the notion of gender and power is also addressed in chapter three.

1.7.4 Chapter four

This chapter provides descriptions of the research context, the characteristics of the study participants, and outlines challenges that occurred as the study evolved. As the methodology included triangulation of data, the various sources of data collected in the study are described in this chapter.

A summary and discussion of the data gathered and a description of the reflexive nature of the thematic data analysis are described in chapter four. The chapter provides a detailed description of the iterative thematic analysis process applied to the data that emanated from each group in the study and identifies the overarching themes of change and transformation that emerged from the data analysis process. This chapter provides the framework for the further in depth data analysis and discussion that occurs in the subsequent discussion chapters.

1.7.5 Chapter five

The overarching theme of transformation that emerged from the data in this study, is interpreted in chapter five. It begins with an exploration of the calming and normalising dynamic of social learning processes between parents and continues with a description of unique reflective, co-learning practices evident between parent facilitators, parent participants and professionals. The theoretical concepts of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and reflective practice (Schon, 1987) are identified as concepts that may significantly influence change for parents in this study as they learn and work alongside professionals and other parents. The chapter also illuminates the possibility for parents to adapt newly acquired skills that emerged from shared learning experiences, and replicate those skills in other social contexts

Chapter five concludes with an illustration of the profound change that occurred for the 'parent facilitators' of a parenting intervention. Their journey from being service recipient to a reflective 'partner in practice' (Daley, Menke, Kirkpatrick & Sheets, 2008) within the service context is observed. Relational agency (Edwards, 2005) was evident in the shared partnership practices between parents and professionals as they worked together in the provision of the parenting intervention.

1.7.6 Chapter six

The very common and complex issue, experienced by parent support services, of engaging and effectively supporting families who are do not regularly access services, is explored in chapter six. The study data provides a rare insight into the multiple issues that intersect and compound disadvantage for families experiencing adversity. Through the data presented in this chapter, the cumulative effect of these issues, together with the 'sharp edges' of services that can perpetuate disengagement, are shown to potentially hinder opportunities for parents and parent support professionals to engage each other in relationships that could benefit parents and their families.

This chapter illuminates the potentially influential role performed by local parents in rounding off the sharp edges of services that can result in families disengaging for the service system. Data discussed in chapter six illustrates parents performing valuable roles within parent support services whereby they transcend the boundaries between parenting services and other parents who have difficulty accessing the services. The interpersonal skills and attributes of practitioners and other key individuals that help facilitate respectful engagement of all families are also described in this chapter.

Chapter six concludes with the proposition that parent support services can be more accessible to parents through the design and implementation of models of service provision characterised by parents and professionals engaging with each other as co-workers and co-learners.

1.7.7 Chapter seven

This chapter builds on the discussion from the previous two chapters and explores transformation in relation to practices across parenting support interventions, enabling a new model of shared practice that can promote engagement with families who have found services difficult to access. Interactions between parents and professional workers,

evidenced through the data from this study are described as a relational model of co-producing partnership. The model of co-producing partnership is characterised by relationship development, shared reflection and learning, and a climate that enables the co-production of new ways of working that are more accessible to families that are less likely to trust or access services. Central to this model of partnership is the interplay of a variety of theoretical concepts and the informal, authentic and potentially transformative interactions that occur at their intersection. Chapter seven considers the powerful influence of an alternate approach to parenting education that has the capacity to shape and influence new practices, and challenge contemporary conceptualisations of hierarchical authority and power

1.7.8 Chapter eight

Chapter eight provides a summary of the key issues that have arisen from the study and directly addresses each of the sub questions. The contribution that this study makes, and suggestions for areas that may require further attention, are also outlined in this chapter. Woven through the discussion chapters, a key argument of this study is that parents who experience adversity, or have felt judged or stigmatised by professionals, are most likely to engage with parenting interventions that are provided in ways that help them feel comfortable, valued, and are delivered by people to whom they can relate. Building on descriptions in chapters five and six of practices, processes and behaviours that facilitate co-learning in parent support contexts, it is recommended in chapter eight that these same characteristics could be replicated across disciplines to enable engaging parent support service models for families experiencing difficulty in accessing services.

1.8 New developments that are required by the current state of knowledge in this field.

In a significant percentage of cases, marginalised Australians are parents with dependent children (Australian Council of Social Service, 2013). Mendes, (2017) draws the conclusion that neo-liberal interests appear to have benefitted wealthy groups. In order to address current inequalities in Australian society, more needs to be done to ensure welfare consumers and the community are able to participate with the state in construction of longer term strategies that result in longer term social spending to improve conditions for all people (Mendes, 2017).

This thesis proposes that fundamental changes are required in the way services are designed, structured and delivered in order to genuinely engage families, who have traditionally struggled to engage with services. It calls for a reconceptualised model of practice in relation to parent education reflected by partnership and co-delivery with parents. This proposition will present a challenge to many existing parenting education models given it calls for more democratic approaches to the design and delivery of parenting interventions than what is currently evident across mainstream parenting interventions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Profound technological and scientific advancement over the past century has shaped changes in the social and physical contexts in which families live and children are raised. These changes have resulted in growing inequalities in the distribution of wealth (Richardson & Prior, 2005) leading to disparities between individuals. These disparities are often evident in children by school entry age (Walker et al., 2011) and can continue across the life course. In addition, research evidence suggests that traditional service approaches fail to engage the growing numbers of Australian families experiencing disadvantage (Moore, McDonald, McHugh-Dillon & West, 2016). The compounding effect of stigma and isolation experienced by such families can result in parents being mistrustful or suspicious of services and resistant to contact with the service system (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012; Attride-Stirling et al., 2001). This can result in children not receiving the additional professional help that would benefit their learning, growth and development (Sawyer et al., 2000).

Despite the relative prosperity of Australian families, it is argued that Australia is becoming a less equal society with increasing rates of poverty and disadvantage (Mendes, 2017). Current political discourses construct poverty and disadvantage as a matter of individual choice as opposed to a broader social and moral responsibility (Mendes, 2017). The rapidly changing social and policy contexts in which children are parented warrants a reconsideration and diversification of the current approaches to the provision of parent support.

This literature review will critically examine the evidence in relation to parenting support and current service models that aim to support parents in their parenting role. In reviewing the parenting support literature, questions arise about the effectiveness and positioning of parenting support programs designed and delivered by professionals. This examination reveals that parenting has, in the past, been conceptualised as a condition that can be improved, treated or fixed through expert led interventions. This review demonstrates that many current approaches to parenting support are often informed by deficit constructs and discourses leading to practices that further marginalise and alienate some families.

Additionally, wider societal influences, including the emergence and privileging of neo-liberal framings of public policy, further stigmatise the most vulnerable groups in society. What emerges are discourses and practices that narrowly view and position families already experiencing vulnerability and thereby contributing to the perpetuation of disadvantage and isolation such policies seek to address.

2.2 What happens to children early in life matters

A significant body of scientific evidence reinforces the importance of young children being influenced by contexts, environments and parenting behaviours that can positively or negatively influence their early development (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010). Positive influences can equip the child with the necessary experiences to learn about relationships, acquire necessary skills, manage the stressors of life (Gerhardt, 2009) and achieve critical developmental milestones that are foundational for their future health and well-being (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000).

Research has enabled greater and more widespread understanding of the importance of early human attachment in psychosocial development, and the effect the environment plays in shaping and influencing the overall development, health and well-being of the growing infant (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010; Ottersen, 2010). This research literature is primarily located in the fields of developmental psychology, neuroscience, and epidemiology. It illustrates a mounting body of international evidence highlighting the significance of the early years of a child's development and the subsequent effect of this on later health and well-being outcomes (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010; Olds, 2006; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000; McCain & Mustard, 1999).

The findings from early brain research have been widely interpreted by developmental researchers to suggest there is a window of opportunity, at which time the human brain is more malleable and responsive to early family experiences (Walsh, 2012; Perry & Szalavitz, 2010), environmental influences (McCain & Mustard, 1999; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000), and nutritional interventions (Ottersen, 2010). It has also been shown that a parent's level of educational attainment and mental health correlates significantly with children's subsequent social-emotional outcomes (Yamauchi, 2010).

However, a recent synthesis of the research literature (Moore et al., 2017) concludes that the way humans develop is the result of a variety of genetic, epigenetic and environmental

factors that interact with each other as an integrated system. Moore et al., (2017) argue it is possible for families, communities and governments to influence outcomes for children, if child development is influenced by a mix of heritable and environmental factors. This interpretation is reinforced by research findings that stress the capacity of the developing infant to be resilient in situations of adversity (Ham & Tronick, 2006; McEwen, Gray & Nasca, 2015). Focusing on resilience has helped to shift the lens in the context of public policy, research and practice, from considering children's vulnerability and risk, to recognizing opportunities to enhance individual capability. Nonetheless, Panter-Brick and Leckman (2013) call for a more disciplined use of resilience as measures for resilience are not sufficiently comprehensive.

Regardless of a child's personal resilience, every child's health and well-being requires conditions that promote and enable their optimum development. The most critical of these are often dependent on parents, whatever their family structure, having the capacity to provide the necessary environments and relational attachments in which children can thrive.

Parenting has been defined in western contexts as "…the focussed and differentiated relationship that the young child has with the adult(s) who is most emotionally invested in and consistently available to him/her." (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000). The American Psychological Association points to parenting practices that positively contribute to the child's development which include ensuring children's health and safety; preparing children for productive adult life; and, the transmission of cultural values (Kazdin, 2000).

2.3 Families: Influential and influenced

Notwithstanding the influence of the family on the developing child, the concept of family is one that is currently in a state of flux and thereby difficult to define given the liquid modern landscape in which it continues to evolve (Strong, DeVault & Cohen, 2008). Consequently, Gillies (2011) proposes that 'family', as a theoretically definable concept, is problematic and argues it may be more useful to consider the notion of 'families' or 'family relationships'. Recent theoretical perspectives have moved away from emphasis on family structure to a focus on the quality of relationships. Within the context of families, what was once obligational is now considered to be more negotiated, and changes in traditional constructions and functions of 'family' correspond with changes in community life (Hughes

& Stone, 2003). Examples of this can be seen in increasingly flexible approaches to individualised and negotiated parent relationships.

The family, as an entity, has been further influenced and shaped by evolving patterns of workforce participation and changing gender roles. For example, in the Australian context, since 1996, the number of mothers studying rose by nearly ten per cent and in the same period the percentage of mothers who were in the workforce increased from 46.1 to 53.4 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In the North American context the percentage of working mothers has also significantly increased. Research conducted by Frankenhaeuser, Lundberg and Chesney (2012), asserts that 'role strain' can arise out of conflict between work and family roles including what they called 'spillover' from mothers work roles to their family life. Such changes are thought by some to contribute to community decline (Hughes & Stone, 2003; Putnam, 2000). An example proffered by Hughes and Stone is that changes in family life are seen as a causal factor for changes in community life including declining levels of social capital. This, they point out, has been blamed for the eventual erosion of levels of community attachment and trust (Hughes & Stone, 2003). In isolation, such arguments could potentially be interpreted as apportioning blame to mothers for contributing to community decline through their increased participation in the workforce. However, an alternative view is that the traditional perspective of family as an economic and social institution responsible for organizing and governing everyday life and intimate relationships, is a narrow and out-dated perspective of family. This perspective effectively positions and blames families experiencing poverty as beneficiaries of their own dysfunction (Daly & Kelly 2015).

Whilst the effects of poverty in general are well documented, less is known, or has been theorised, about poverty in the context of family life (Daly & Kelly, 2015). Australian families that experience poverty are known to be more likely to have non-traditional family structures; not have regular employment; have young children and sometimes multiple children; be headed by a young parent; and, have members of the household who are sick or disabled (Australian Council of Social Service, 2013). La Placa and Corlyon (2016) caution against over simplifying the relationship between parenting, poverty and child outcomes as these are influenced by complex and intricate factors such as parental stress, family poverty, neighbourhood environments, and disrupted parenting. These are examples of risk factors encountered by some families that can threaten parent, child and family well-being,

and are considered to increase the vulnerability of the families (Families with vulnerabilities, 2014).

Vulnerability has been described as both a micro (individual) and macro (population wide) concept as overcoming adversity may be viewed from both a population and individual perspective (Hanappi, 2014). In recent decades, the term 'vulnerability' has been used extensively in the parenting research literature with a primary focus on the well-being of dependent children being influenced by the vulnerability of their caregivers. Parents that are exposed to risk factors can temporarily lack the capacity to mitigate the child's dependency (Lotz, 2017). From a child development perspective, a young child's exposure to stressful conditions that interfere with parenting relationships can lead to attachment problems. These can continue through the life course unless mediated by other secure attachments (Gomez & Brown, 2007). All parents and families have the potential to move into and out of periods of vulnerability influenced by risk factors such as mental health issues, stress, environmental and relational issues, or trauma and loss. Ideally, a child's well-being depends on other structures of support that can help buffer against periods of vulnerability.

In Australia, poverty and disadvantage persist in many communities (Vinson & Rawsthorne, 2015). This is despite government policies that promote individual empowerment through universal access to education and health care. Labelled as 'vulnerable' and 'hard to reach', entire Australian communities continue to be disproportionally afflicted by complex or wicked problems (Australian Public Services Commission (APSC), 2007). By their complex and relentless nature, wicked problems are multi layered, and permeate and influence the whole of society (Weber & Khademian, 2008). Such unmanageable, broad problems may contribute to, or perpetuate, a state of vulnerability and disempowerment for those who comprise the 'precariat' (Standing, 2011; 2012), living on the margins with diminished opportunity to advocate for themselves. In Australia, those living in the most precarious situations are often parents and their dependent children.

However, parenting does not take place in a vacuum, and is influenced by a complex web of interdependent factors including the effectiveness of supports and interventions that should be available to parents (Moran, Ghate & van der Merwe, 2004) Babies are born into a relational dynamic of families – the 'micro-system' (Bronfenbrenner, Moen, Elder &

Luscher, 1979) which is also influenced by both immediate and wider fluid social contexts. All the individuals involved are themselves influencers of and influenced by these networks and systems (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

2.4 Beyond the family: The multiple influences on the developing child

Parents and families ideally need access to a diverse range of networks and service supports in the crucial task of caring for and nurturing the developing child, (Swick & Williams, 2006). These networks and supports have been identified as being informal, semi-formal and formal (Ghate & Hazel, 2002). Networks of family and friends comprise the 'informal' network and it is often the connections within these networks that significantly influence the construction of parenting behaviours (Byrnes & Miller, 2012). It is also recognised that parenting behaviours can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975; Singh Narang & Contreras, 2004). Understanding the influence of networks on parenting behaviours, and the capacity for such behaviours to be transmitted across generations necessitates that parent support services consider the impact of informal networks on individual families.

In an attempt to understand the multiple influences parents encounter, and the decisions they make, it is useful to view children and their families from an ecological perspective. It has been argued that Bronfenbrenner's 1979 ecological model of human development is a key theoretical advancement in relation to understanding parenting, particularly in relation to why and how parents in certain contexts may behave in particular ways (Katz et al., 2007; Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002).

The Ecological Model of Development (Bronfenbrenner, Moen, Elder & Luscher, 1979) illustrates various levels (systems) and a myriad of two-way influences on the developing child. It proposes five socially organized sub-systems that guide and influence human development (Bronfenbrener & Ceci, 1994). From an ecological perspective of the developing child, the family comprises the microsystem. Being closest in proximity to the child, and the child's most intimate learning setting (Swick & Williams, 2006), the family potentially influences the development of the child more profoundly than any other system (Bronfenbrener et al., 1979). This model draws attention to additional systems of influence beyond the immediate family. They include the 'mesosystem' (extended family, social and informal networks) discussed earlier, the 'exosystem', (formal structures, services and

environments) and the 'macrosystem', (broader external political, financial, social and environmental influences). Numerous diagrammatical depictions of this model, which vary according to the ecological foci, have emerged through the literature. The diagram below illustrates the ecological model of the developing child (Centre for Community Child Health, 2015) with the systems of influence and their proximity to the child. The model proposes that the intensity of influence on the individual child corresponds with the particular system's proximity to the child.

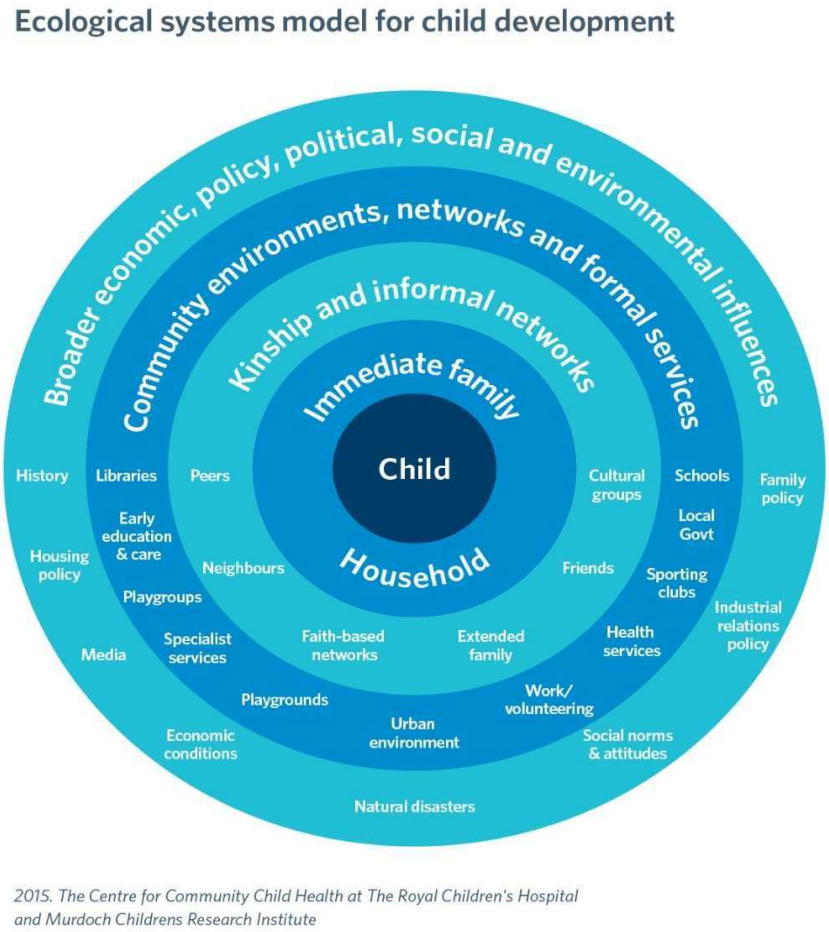

Figure 1: Interpretation of Ecological Systems Model in relation to early child development

Ecological systems theory has been summarised as "…a theory of human development in which everything is seen as interrelated and our knowledge of development is bounded by context, culture, and history" (Darling, 2007, p. 204). Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's seminal work on proximal processes within an ecological paradigm argued that conditions and

events which originate from outside the family have the potential to be powerful influencers of family processes, which in turn can affect human development throughout the life course (1994). Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) contribution of proximal processes within a framework of bio-ecology, added depth to ecological systems theory proposing that organisms within the systems are influenced not only by their context, or the presence of others within and across the systems, but also by the nature and quality of the interactions that occur between them. The bio-ecological paradigm of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) highlights the criticality of bi-directional, reciprocal interactions between individuals across the systems. These interactions, called 'proximal processes' are defined as "enduring, highly interactive processes between a developing organism and other individuals or objects in the environment" (Ceci, 2006, p. 173). The bio-ecological paradigm of human development positions the immediate family as having the greatest potential impact on the child whilst being dependent itself on supportive, high quality bi-directional interactions with others within and across the other outlying systems.

The ecological systems model, including the bio-ecological perspective, has been highly influential on Australian social policy. This theory provides the theoretical basis for the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Sanson, Nicholson, Ungerer, Zubrick & Wilson, 2002). More recently this theory was used by Australian academics in understanding the complexity of the underlying causes of gender based violence including informing the design of interventions for the prevention of violence against women (Walden & Wall, 2014). As important as this work has been, particularly in drawing attention to the multiple layers of influence on the developing human, it must be acknowledged that ecological systems theory is significantly informed by western framings of child development.

Despite the wide spread use of ecological systems theory, criticisms have pointed to:

- how it positions the child as passive and isolated whilst surrounded by a busy and complex world (Darling, 2007);
- possible misuse of the theory in viewing it simplistically as a theory of contextual influences on the developing individual (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009) without allowing for the complexity of bi-directional influences and interactions intended by its authors; and

- its lack of clarity in relation to how the broader, external systems operate, and how varying constructs exert influence across the systems (Sallis, Owen & Fisher, 2015).

These bi-directional influences within and across the ecological systems impact families and can be both risk and protective factors.

2.5 A complementary critical perspective to address power relations

On its own, the ecological systems model is not a robust enough framework to inform a detailed discussion of the multiple layers of influence experienced by parents particularly given the economic and policy flows of twenty first century neo-liberalism.
Nor is it sufficient to explain the complexities of the ways individuals are positioned in Australian society and the impact this can have on their access to networks and resources that benefit the health, well-being and functioning of their families.

The influence of power is not adequately addressed in Bronfenbrenner's theory. The usefulness of an ecological systems framework might be enhanced by incorporating a critical perspective. Taking a critical perspective of the ecological systems framework makes power relations visible, both within and across the systems of influence. Such a perspective has not been commonly brought to the field of parent support. Ecological systems theory has been strongly informed by developmental theory, neuroscience and much of the research is conducted within a positivist, scientific paradigm.

Ecological systems theory has contributed to social policy by drawing attention to the myriad influences on the developing child outside of the immediate family. However, given the complexity of replicating and modelling healthy systems through transdisciplinary design and response, this theory also presents a challenge to policy developers (Levin et al., 2012). It has been highlighted that such integrated effort across an array of services is difficult given the complexities of inter-professional practice (Wong & Sumsion, 2013).

A simplistic interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's one dimensional ecological systems model of human development might view individuals across the systems as equal. However, a critical perspective enables the identification of the influence of other organisms and systems on the child and family enabling a more holistic perspective of the myriad influences on the developing person. Critical theory has been defined as "…a reflective theory that gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation" (Guess, 1981, p. 2). Adopting a critical perspective in the context of

examining family's interactions with parent support services, helps to question the influence of power across the potentially unequal relationships between parents and professionals.

Together, ecological systems theory and a critical perspective add depth to an examination of parenting, and parent support. This is particularly so in rapidly changing contemporary contexts in which hegemonic political ideologies can exacerbate the disadvantage and vulnerability of entire communities and groups of people (Giroux & Giroux, 2006). Critical theory can help discern the power relationships that are invisible and silent in the ecological model. For example, many parents receive support from individuals and events that promote the development of caring and loving microsystems (Swick & Williams, 2006) and these help form the protective foundations for the developing child. However, there exists cultural, political and socially hierarchical dimensions that are not static and that apply external influences on families, impacting the future outcomes of the child (Lee, 2015). Examples of these include inflexible policy contexts that inhibit more flexible service responses for particular groups, and the diversity of social norms and practices across different cultural groups. A critical perspective also helps question and oppose antidemocratic forces and their tendency to subjugate and alienate certain groups such as perpetuating inequality between rich and poor (Giroux & Giroux, 2006).

2.6 Parenting in inequitable and uncertain times

Recent literature argues that Australian society has become less equal in the past few decades (Beer et al., 2015; Mendes, 2017) with successive governments failing to address the rise of poverty and inequality, or to genuinely consult with those who are most impacted by these trends (Mendes, 2017). It has also been argued that policy development in Australia in the past twenty years has viewed economic growth as a solution to poverty and disadvantage (Beer et al., 2015). This assertion is well described by Beer et al. (2015) in their study of how economic conditions, government policy and housing markets impact on vulnerable people. They point out however, that in recent times Australia has witnessed an emergence of non-conventional forms of employment, including significant increases in Australians employed in part-time work, at a time when housing has become less affordable. An Australian policy example is that of the Howard Government's 'welfare to work' initiative in 2007 that resulted in vulnerable groups moving into precarious forms of

employment and being further marginalised in the private housing rental market given increased income uncertainty (Beer et al., 2015).

The Australian Council of Social Services (2013) has asserted that the gap between the income of the average household, and those affected by poverty, has been increasing. As far back as the late 1990's, it was being debated that increases in inequality were in fact the result of neo-liberal reform characterised by lack of progressive taxation systems and diminished social security systems. This was an alternative view to perspectives that asserted rising inequality was due to the relatively new phenomenon of globalisation in which previous welfare measures were inappropriate (Quiggin, 1999). Nonetheless, the fact that recent generations have experienced a period of rapid societal change is not contested. Bauman asserts that "society is being transformed by the passage from the 'solid' to 'liquid' phase of modernity, in which all social forms melt faster than new ones can be cast" (p. 303). This concept, referred to as 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2005), is underpinned by a series of recent phenomena that can be viewed as departures from the old social order creating challenges within more uncertain settings. A challenge offered by Bauman (2005) is that uncertainty breeds fear.

The uncertainty suggested through this notion is complemented by an emerging concept of a new social structure articulated by Guy Standing , of which one key element is identified and labelled 'the precariat' (Standing, 2012). The precariat comprises people who, in this liquid modern world, exist in a precarious state of uncertainty, particularly in relation to employment (Beer et al., 215), sometimes on the margins of poverty, often forced to act opportunistically and holding little political bargaining power (Standing, 2011; 2012). It is maintained that precariousness is multidimensional, with its changing manifestations reflected in social security systems, uncertain workforce opportunities, and unregulated labour markets that all create increased uncertainty for families impacted by these constraints (Campbell & Burgess, 2018). Traditionally predictable structures and networks become less permanent for those living in precarious contexts. This leads to what Lee (2005) calls 'a sense of rootlessness' within all socially constructed structures. The inevitable end point is the increased marginalisation of those without employment.

As one form of disadvantage, poverty can have a detrimental impact on the quality of parenting (Katz, Corlyon, La Placa & Hunter, 2007; La Placa & Corlyon, 2016). However,

caution is warranted about broad brush assumptions assuming that poor parenting and poverty are related. Dermott and Pomati (2016) argue such assertions are misleading given that all families appear to be assessed on their parenting, against benchmarks based on the progress and activity of the most dominant and well-resourced families. The research of Dermott and Pomati (2016) concludes that regardless of socio-economic status, there isn't an overarching 'good parenting package' observed and practiced by any one group of parents. However, the same research concedes that policy discourses, in the UK context, promote an overly narrow perspective of what constitutes good parenting.

The academic literature contains examples of definitions and resources that attempt to measure effective parenting practices. A study that examines the efficacy of a professionally led parenting intervention in the USA, *ParentCorps* deems parenting effectiveness to be identified by the following practices:

> …establishing structure and routines for children, providing opportunities for positive parent–child interactions during child-directed play, using positive reinforcement (e.g., praise, star charts) to encourage compliance and social and behavioural competence, selectively ignoring mild misbehaviours, and providing consistent, nonphysical consequences for misbehaviour… (Brotman et al., 2011, p. 262-263)

Other researchers look beyond parenting skills and strategies to include a focus on the interpersonal qualities of parents such as warmth and acceptance (Hagan et al., 2012); empathy and reflectiveness (Day et al., 2012). A much earlier contribution to this area was the lasting and profound contribution of Donald Winnicott, a British paediatrician and psychoanalyst, who coined the term 'good enough mother' (1953) to describe the necessary 'ordinary' human devotion the infant requires from a parent or caregiver to deal with his/her own human adaptation. He asserted that the good enough 'mother' is able to adapt to the infant's needs and her adaptation lessens as the infant develops in her/his own autonomy and tolerance to cater for the mother's failure of adaptation (1953). Winnicott's phrase, 'good enough' continues to be employed within parenting interventions such as 'Circle of Security' and 'Empowering Parents Empowering Communities' providing an introduction for parents to the concept of attachment and parental sensitivity and responsiveness from the perspective of the child. However, the popular contemporary use of the term 'good enough' within such contexts is simply used

to imply that less than ideal parenting can still be acceptable or unharmful. However, in a child protection context, it has been cautioned that workers need guidance in relation to the use of this terminology with parents given the potential for inconsistencies in parenting standards and behaviours (Choate & Engstrom, 2014). An individual parent or practitioner may deem particular parenting behaviours 'good enough' whilst from the perspective of others, the same behaviours may be assessed as neglectful or damaging. All parents inevitably require a level of parenting knowledge and competence in order to provide effective care for their children.

Sandler et al., (2011) argue that the concept of 'effective parenting' is complex given that it would vary depending on the different developmental stages of a child, biological differences between children, and also the array of social and cultural contexts in which children are raised. The notion of effective parenting practices applied to the Australian context is therefore problematic given the diversification of contemporary family structures, their varied environmental contexts, cultural differences and practices. Clauss-Ehlers (2017) argues however that the diversity of 21st century families means that professionals need to be able to consult an evidence base that is clear about effective parenting practices. She concludes that whilst a solid foundation is available, more research is necessary before such evidence exists (Clauss-Ehlers, 2017). However, given the diverse situations in which families live, there is something unsettling about a search for universal evidence in relation to effective parenting practices. Clauss-Ehlers call for such evidence highlights constraints in the western one-size-fits-all approach to models of parenting support that reflect a middle class construct on what effective parenting entails (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). Despite the lack of conclusive evidence pertaining to effective parenting practices, policy discourses in relation to what constitutes 'effective parenting' continue to permeate the Australian political landscape. By way of example the 'Centre for Parenting Excellence' was established by the Western Australian Government in 2016. The existence of such political constructions, that suggest a continuum exists in relation to parenting competence, may inadvertently serve to further perpetuate stigmatised perspectives about families with fewer resources or those experiencing levels of disadvantage that impact detrimentally on their children. However, one important resource available to most Australian parents, that

can potentially help buffer against adversity, is social networks of support. The potential impact of social supports, on both parents and children, is well supported in the literature.

2.7 Social mechanisms that influence parenting

Distinct types of environmental conditions and social mechanisms, including social networks of support, can have a potent influence on parents' lives and parenting behaviours (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). Sometimes used interchangeably, the functions of social networks and social support are individually distinguishable and perform different functions. Social networks can be viewed as more structural or functional, as opposed to social supports that can emanate from social networks but include relational dimensions and reciprocity (Finfgeld-Connett, 2005; Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Reciprocity refers to the "behaviour in which two people or groups of people give each other help and advantages (Cambridge online dictionary, 2018).

Christakis and Fowler (2009) argue that social networks have two fundamental aspects. The first is 'connection'. That is, who is connected to who? The second aspect identified by Christakis and Fowler (2009) is 'contagion', meaning 'that which flows across the connections'. Formal and informal social supports emerge from connections and have been shown to play a critical role in promoting optimum developmental outcomes for children and the well-being of their families (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch & Ungar, 2005; Fielden & Gallagher, 2006; McConnell, Breitkreuz & Savage, 2011). Effective social supports have also been shown to provide a buffer for individuals experiencing stress (Weiss, 2002) and promote effective parenting behaviours (Byrnes & Miller, 2012). There is evidence that many people find it more helpful to receive support from family and friends and their wider network of acquaintances before turning to professional support (Ablewhite et al., 2015; Roehlkepartain et al., 2002). Power, Willmot and Davidson (2011) found at least three quarters of people living in four British disadvantaged neighbourhoods were influenced by the role of their neighbours and said they would call on them for help when needed. Where possible, parents supplement information from family, friends and others in their extended network with support from professional sources (Bornstein, Cote, Haynes, Hahn & Park, 2010).

Whilst social relationships have the potential to act as social glue in helping people deal with uncertainty (Goodwin, 2005), they can also be a source of stress for others (Coyne &

DeLongis, 1986). The literature illuminates a general view within the social sciences that the extended family, social and informal networks, potentially perform a protective function in buffering against the harmful effects of mental illnesses on the parenting process (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012; Finfgeld-Connett, 2005). However, it has been argued that there is limited potential for social relationships and support to positively cushion against adversity, including the deleterious effect of poverty and disadvantaged neighbourhoods on parenting (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1994; Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). It is known that some families in high poverty communities choose social isolation as a survival strategy, particularly when they do not trust their neighbours, or feel threatened by them (Bess & Doykos, 2014). This might suggest that caution is therefore warranted to avoid overstating the capacity of social support as a protective factor for families experiencing difficulty. Although parents' perception of increased social support may help them feel anchored within a network of family and friends, it is possible their perception of increased social supports are insufficient to counteract complexities of the life many people experience (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Therefore, a parent's perceived increase in social support does not necessarily enable a conclusion that the support will impact positively on the parent's confidence, available resources and ability to parent effectively.

In addition to the known influence of social networks and supports, specific neighbourhood conditions can influence the psychological well-being of individuals. For example run down physical environments, perceptions of community violence and disorder, and lack of green spaces and natural environments, are known to contribute to stress and potential depression for some residents (Mair, Roux & Morenoff, 2010).

Whilst social support is a concept widely used in the research literature, it is the view offered by Geens and Vandenbroek (2012) that has particular pertinence to this study. They offer a conceptualisation of social support that is comprised of a relational dimension and reciprocity. The notion of reciprocity in all forms of support implies bidirectional benefit. The important dimensions of relationship and reciprocity within this view of social support can be used in challenging traditional approaches to formal parent support. Traditional approaches have reflected a broad spectrum of models from service driven, uni-directional transactions between professionals and parents to approaches that reflect notions of democratic partnership (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). The latter have the potential to

enable parents and professionals to become co-contributors to new ways of being together through which they could learn and benefit from each other. Other research has shown reciprocity to be evident as a level of cultural awareness in relationships between parents and professionals where parents are supported to increase their level of involvement and decision making in relation to their children living with special needs (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1997). The same authors conclude that a 'posture of reciprocity' can occur in such professional/parent relationships in which they learn from each other about their individual worldview and perspectives (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1997).

The collective energy that can be generated from the interactions within networks and social supports has been conceptualised as another complementary social asset, referred to as social capital.

2.8 Social Capital as a form of social support

Social capital has emerged as influential in shaping social policy and public discourses across countries like Australia (Kirkby-Geddes, King & Bravington, 2013; Portes, 2000). Whilst social capital remains a relevant and helpful concept to help explain the interplay of social connections, relationships, and the environment (Taylor, Kajganich & Pavić, 2011), the concept of social capital has more recently been criticised for its multiplicity of definitions, varied measures and applications (Lin, 2008). Lin argues that this could undermine social capital as a worthy scientific theory and lead to its downfall (2008).

Robert Putnam (2000), a seminal author in the field, defines social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 18). Putnam asserts that social capital works to benefit the broader community by building respectful social networks and promoting cooperation (2000).

Social capital was originally described as comprising 'bonding' (exclusive) social capital – and 'bridging' (inclusive) social capital (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital includes specific interest groups and clubs that reinforce exclusive identities; bridging social capital is achieved by those groups' ability to support broader community linkages and disseminate information. A later contribution by Szreter & Woolcock (2004), extended Putnam's definitions, describing a third form of *linking* social capital They defined linking social capital as the "norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority

gradients in society." (p. 556). Given the traditional and inevitable power gradients across parent/practitioner relationships, linking social capital presents a challenge to professionals in order to enable the conditions necessary to achieve the type of trusting relationships proposed by Szreter and Woolcock (2004). Social capital does not just emerge in isolation. It depends on complex linkages with other forms of capital such as human and financial capital, and is reliant on forms of leadership that can mobilise available resources and are motivated by collective action and ownership (Onyx & Leonard, 2011).

As a concept social capital has been criticised as lacking coherence and depth, partly due to its simplicity and diverse applications (Bjornskov & Sonderskov, 2012). It has been viewed as providing only a simplistic account of complex community relations (Kirby-Geddes, King & Bravington, 2013) and as an inadequate target for reducing disadvantage given its capacity to co-exist alongside poverty (Wong & Sumsion, 2013). An example of these is the potential for bonded groups to experience a sense of cohesion internally through their shared social norms whilst serving to exclude those perceived as having different norms (Kirby-Geddes, King & Bravington, 2013). Other critiques have been offered from a variety of perspectives. These include the potential for social capital to contribute to health inequalities within communities (De Silva, McKenzie, Harpham & Huttly, 2005); the lack of depth in how it has been investigated (McKenzie, Whitley & Weich, 2002); and, the insufficient delineation in the literature between social supports, social networks and social capital (Hawkins & Maurer, 2011).

Despite its shortcomings, social capital has been shown to be influential in Australian adult learning contexts (Balatti, Black & Falk, 2007; 2009). In the area of adult literacy and numeracy education, Balatti et al., (2007) found there are things that the educator does, when teaching, that can contribute to the production of social capital outcomes. Specifically, they refer to pedagogical practices that enable the emergence of networks that the adult learners become members of through their participation. These findings may be useful when examining the experiences of parents' participation in a peer-led parenting intervention.

Organisations involved in the provision of interventions that aim to build social capital may benefit from a more nuanced understanding of social capital and the potential for it to be

oversimplified (Bjornskov & Sonderskov, 2012) or confused with other complementary concepts like social support (Hawkins & Maurer, 2011).

Through their relationships with parents and children, professionals are in a position to form a part of the support networks for families that are most in need of support. However, services must first acknowledge and address the ingrained service and policy constructions of families that can marginalise and oppress parents and their children (Fowler et al., 2012).

2.9 Discourses, perspectives and practices that can marginalise families

Australia's current political discourse is saturated with powerful rhetoric directed at the nation's most disadvantaged people. The mantra of the Abbott Federal Government, in power between 2013 and 2015, challenged welfare recipients to be "lifters, not leaners, workers, not shirkers, and earning or learning" (Meagher & Wilkins, 2014, p.1). This reinforces Gillies' argument that whilst some forms of discrimination are considered abhorrent, class inequality is not just tolerated, but justified and expected in discourses that depict working class people as lazy and ignorant (2006).

Similar neo-liberal narratives that perpetuate inequality exist in other places. Jensen (2013) argues that the recent global financial crisis, which resulted from the excesses of the privileged few, was put to work ideologically in Britain to transfer a narrative of financial austerity onto the parent, who was viewed as failing and lacking the aspiration and ability to make the right choices. Resembling Jensen's British observation, the Australian Smart Population Foundation Initiative (SPFI) was critically examined by Millei and Lee (2007). This example of well-intentioned policy that aimed to translate knowledge and science for Australian parents was a Howard Government strategy based on the agreeable premise that children need the best start possible in life.

However, Millei and Lee concluded that political discourses arising from the initiative reflected an imposition of a 'one size fits all' expert perspective on parenting. This, they argued, could stifle dialogue, further marginalise and make deficit of parents that didn't conform to the expert prescription (2007).

Such dominant discourses, sometimes perpetuated through social policy, are deeply problematic for the way they position vulnerable communities as deficit and disturbances to the mainstream (Murray, 2004). It has been found that such deficit policy discourses influence professionals constructions of families (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). What these

policies and political perspectives lack, are a nuanced understanding of the longer term and more sustainable benefits that are found in people being supported by social investment to achieve their own transformations; to gain control through interventions that acknowledge and capitalize on parents' strengths and encourage skill development.

Despite the positive intentions of Australian governments in targeting policy and services towards the most disadvantaged families and communities, their efforts have been criticised for demonizing struggling parents, inadvertently labelling them as incompetent and viewing them as requiring increased management (Gillies, 2011). An additional perspective, that adds further complexity to policy frameworks, is the potential for policy to negatively influence generations of familial behaviours through programs, interventions and incentives (Carlson & Meyer, 2014). An example in the Australian context is the continued plight of Australia's first people. This situation exists despite well intentioned, but often ill-informed policies implemented over several decades (Sutton, 2001). The amalgam of complex issues previously discussed, can hinder parent engagement and service accessibility. It warrants a systemic response that moves beyond identifying parents and families as those needing to change, to addressing the necessary change within and across services (Centre for Community Child Health, 2009) to enable all families to access such services.

2.10 Hard to reach parents or inaccessible services?

In the Australian context child and family support services are provided by a mix of agencies and organisations. These include government and non-government agencies, with a diverse mix of government funding and self-funded arrangements. The family support sector caters for the majority of Australian families but continues to struggle to engage effectively with families traditionally viewed as hard-to-reach. Despite evidence of more collaborative and joined up approaches to working with families deemed most vulnerable, more still needs to be done (McArthur, Thomson, Winkworth, Butler, 2010). In relation to the provision of tertiary family support services in Australia, Astor and Croucher (2010) refer to a complex and confusing system of fragmented services where marginalised families fall through the cracks. This resonates with the 'inverse care law' (Tudor Hart, 1971) which proposes that these very families are least likely to be able to access the help they need whilst medical care and other forms of support tend to be most easily accessible to those least in need.

There are many known barriers that inhibit effective engagement between services and families. It is particularly difficult for services to develop relationships with families when parents struggle to trust professionals or view them with suspicion (Boag-Munroe, Evangelou, 2012; Whalley et al., 2010). In addition, parents can feel overwhelmed and subjugated by bureaucratic discourses even in situations where professional workers believe the outcomes of the interactions or interventions were positive (Ney, Stolz, & Maloney, 2011). Further compounding the complex task of building trusting relationships with families are those things that exacerbate the effect of families "experiencing adversity" (Goldfeld, Price & Kemp, 2018). These include unemployment, low educational attainment, diminished capacity to save, difficulty moderating consumption of illicit substances and history of criminality (Karelis, 2007). It is not uncommon for these factors to cluster together across communities (Vinson & Rawsthorne, 2015) further magnifying the disadvantage evident in particular communities.

Improving outcomes for children in communities characterised by disadvantage necessitates that services work in ways that make them more accessible to families (Evangelou et al., 2013). Katz (2007) suggests that strategies for community engagement are necessary to enable more effective service approaches in such communities. However, this still isn't given adequate attention from a social policy and planning perspective. For example, located at the fringes of the Australian urban sprawl, some of the emerging geographical pockets of disadvantage in Australia are new developments that lack the necessary attention required to address the effects of high density low cost housing (Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire, 2015). However, not only do services need to be physically accessible to families, but services must also acknowledge that issues such as stigmatising environments and worker focused conveniences (hours of operation, modes of delivery) hinder effective engagement between professionals and the most disengaged families (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012).

Deficit focused service terminology used to describe certain groups, can frame families and communities as problematic (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010). This results in further marginalisation of the very families and communities who could most benefit from parenting services. Terms like 'hard to reach parent', common in service provision discourse, is an example. This term has been used to describe families' characterised by lack of skills, knowledge, or resources to access services, and those experiencing a period of

vulnerability through exclusion, isolation or detachment from the system (Evangelou et al., 2013). However, whilst the term 'hard to reach' refers to the service experience of difficulty engaging some families, it says nothing about how services themselves may be hard to reach from the perspective of families (Crozier & Davies, 2007). It has been identified that the way interventions or programs are marketed to families can make them inaccessible to families and the common top-down approaches, which characterise most parent support interventions, make services unresponsive to local need (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012).

A significant percentage of Australian families live in communities that have low levels of social cohesion (Vinson, Rawsthorne & Cooper, 2007). Vinson et al. (2007) found that as few as 1.7 per cent of Australian postcodes across Australia account for a disproportionate (by seven times) number of factors that cause poverty across generations (2007). This is compounded by some family's profound disconnect from services, which themselves, are often not able to identify and/or find disengaged families, and lack the skills or resources to engage families labelled as 'hard-to-reach' (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). Whilst it is easy to simplistically label families as different and difficult to reach, a more robust exploration of the reasons why some families do not engage with services is necessary.

It is evident that many Australian families are overwhelmed by a cluster of complex factors that result in them experiencing difficulty in using generalist services (Katz et al., 2006). Services cannot assume parents know how to identify sources of support and then access them, particularly as the concept of seeking help from services is a learnt behaviour (Slee, 2006). Some parents are unable to articulate their need or have preconceptions about asking for help as a weakness or failure (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). Further, some parents' lack the ability to identify their own needs and then access the appropriate support that is provided with the intensity necessary for their needs (Goldfeld, Price & Kemp, 2018).

The already complex work of engaging and working with families is arguably exacerbated by service providers' descriptions of them as 'vulnerable' and 'detached'. In theory, they are families whose access to services is limited due to a number of factors (Evangelou et al., 2013). Professionals' negative perceptions about parents, and parent's own perceptions of being criticised by others about their situation, can further alienate parents from services (Winkworth, McArthur, Layton, Thomson & Wilson, 2010). The notion of making deficit of

others who are unlike oneself has been referred to as 'othering' and is a phenomenon well documented in the literature (Canales, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Dervin, 2016).

The practice of 'othering' – "that process which serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself." (Weis, 1995, p. 17), can perpetuate the experience of marginalisation and exclusion to the detriment of the 'other' (Johnson et al., 2004). 'Othering' is known to be deeply embedded in everyday discourse of professionals, particularly health care providers (Johnson et al., 2004). It highlights the inherent biases and discriminatory attitudes that must be overcome in order to move towards more collaborative practices with parents. Gillies (2011) suggests that common depictions of bad families focus on the damage and negative consequences of harmful parenting practices, and these generate a broader and stigmatising moral commentary.

Negative constructions of parents can promote a judgmental climate of moral citizenship (Breheny & Stephens, 2009). The pervasiveness of deficit terminology and perspectives about some families suggest a common perception that some groups just tend to parent badly (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; Lam & Kwong, 2014). In the context of parent support, parents are frequently judged by standards considered acceptable by white middle class Australian families (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; La Placa & Corlyon, 2016). Current theories of child development and parenting which are supported by research in western contexts, influence the dominant framings of public policy (Gillies, 2011) and these influence the shape and design of many models and programs designed to support parents. Many of these are offered from a powerful perspective that parents need to be educated through the superior knowledge of experts (Lam & Kwong, 2014).

2.11 Educating parents to parent: What constitutes effective parenting support?

Engaging parents in interventions is difficult where parents struggle to trust the professionals delivering them (Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin & Berry, 2012). In a synthesis of literature relating to parents and professionals perceptions in parenting programs, Koerting et al., (2013) identified parents' mistrust of professionals as a common theme. This literature cited examples where parents feared being reported to child protection authorities and instances where professionals' different cultural backgrounds created a barrier between parents and professionals.

In Australia, a variety of parenting interventions exist for Australian families where children might be at risk of abuse or neglect. The active assumption of such programs is that intervening with parents can improve parental capacity and skills, enhance some outcomes for children, and possibly reduce the risk of child maltreatment (Johnson et al., 2008). In 2012, a paper from the Australian Parenting Research Centre identified 151 programs that target child, parent and family outcomes. Of these, only 34 were found to be well supported or backed by international evidence (Wade et al.). Given these findings, there is a need to consider the necessary characteristics of parenting interventions that will enable effective engagement with parents who remain disengaged from parenting services.

There is a limited evidence base for what constitutes consistently effective parenting education programs. A quarter to a third of participating families do not benefit from even the best evidence-based parent training interventions (Scott & Dadds, 2009). Likewise, evidence is limited as to why some families benefit more than others from such interventions (Moran & Ghate, 2005). In the Western context parenting programs may include intensive home visiting interventions; centre based early education and care initiatives which include parents interacting with their children; and curriculum based educative group learning experiences (Grindal et al., 2016). Because of the breadth of literature that exists under the general term 'parenting program', discussion in this chapter is concentrated on the latter.

The literature related to parenting education highlights the variety of general aims for parenting education program provision (Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008; Mejia, Calam & Sanders, 2012; Day et al., 2012; Wade et al., 2012). These include improving the quality of parent/child relationships; reducing child disruptive behaviours; improving outcomes for children by enhancing parenting knowledge, behaviours and cognition; and improving parenting skills and abilities. Indeed, research about effective parenting education programs has pointed to their contribution to increasing parents' confidence and child rearing skills (Carter & Kahn, 1996); preventing emotional and behavioural problems in children (Sanders, 1999; Mejia, Calam & Sanders, 2012), improving child behaviour for children with Oppositional Defiance Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013), and supporting parents of children with special needs (Schultz, Schmidt & Stichter, 2011; Webster-Stratton, 2015). However, general criticisms of the collective evidence include critiques that the research has often been

conducted in high-income, first world countries (Mejia, Calam & Sanders, 2012), is sometimes methodologically limited (Holzer, Higgins, Bromfield & Higgins, 2006) and can lack the evidence of impartial, externally conducted evaluations or sufficient intervention numbers to validate conclusions (Coyne & Kwakkenbos, 2013). Research evidence that is often given the greatest attention comes from controlled trials, is artificial given the nature of controlled research, and therefore does not always fit the reality of practice in other environments and contexts (Green, 2006). Current rhetoric promoting evidence-based approaches to parenting support (Clauss-Ehlers, 2017) has driven research that is performed in such paradigms. This leaves a significant gap in relation to the availability of alternative forms of evidence that illuminates the personal experiences of a diverse mix of parents and families emanating from involvement participation in parent support interventions.

Despite this gap in the evidence, parenting education programs are a key strategy of family support services globally. High profile, well marketed programs have been replicated across numerous cultural contexts and experienced rapid international growth. Provided in 25 countries, translated into 20 languages, and delivered by over 55,000 practitioners, the Australian Triple P program is a prominent example (Small changes, big differences: Triple P takes the guesswork out of parenting, n.d.). However, despite its international and commercial success the 'Triple P' program has been subject to criticism for claims made by its developers based on what have been considered methodologically shallow studies (Wilson et al., 2012; Coyne & Kwakkenbos, 2013; Vandenbroeck, 2014). Such criticisms lead to the question, what constitutes an effective parenting education intervention?

The research literature suggests caution about oversimplifying the anticipated impact of parent education given the extenuating and complex issues many parents encounter (La Placa and Corlyon, 2016). Whilst the dominant focus of the research has been on expert led parenting interventions, Clauss-Ehlers (2017) argues that an evidence base does not exist for parenting interventions that are most effective across a broad array of family structures and contexts. Nonetheless, evidence based parenting interventions that include parents and other community volunteers in their design and delivery have been successfully implemented in the Australian context. The contribution of parents and community members to the delivery of programs like Community Mothers' Programme, NEWPIN, and Families and Schools Together (FAST), in Australian communities characterised by

disadvantage, has been recognised (Johnson, Howell & Molloy, 1993; Mondy & Mondy, 2003; Scott, 2000). These three programs represent an array of centre based and outreach strategies. Despite the involvement of community members in these interventions, their input appears limited to voluntary unpaid contributions. FAST is more commonly recognised as a strategy to enhance parent involvement in schools and comprises a trained collaborative community team of professionals, with at least one community member, that guide parents to direct their families in the FAST activities (Kratochwill et al., 2009). Likewise, NEWPIN attempts to build parents' capacity through increasing their involvement in their community and through the provision of centre based therapeutic support (Uniting NEWPIN, 2017). Like FAST, NEWPIN includes the volunteer contribution of other community members through a befriending process with the aim of supporting newcomers to the program (Mondy & Mondy, 2003). However, their contribution appears limited to peer support as the therapy group, including an instructive program called the 'Personal Development Program', which sits at the heart of NEWPIN, is facilitated by professionals. Peer to peer interaction within FAST has been shown to provide a vital part in role modelling (Mechielsen, Galbraith & White, 2014) and increased social connection with other local parents who participated (Knox, Guerra, Williams & Toro, 2011). Likewise, the community befrienders within NEWPIN, whilst providing initial outreach to new families and mentoring within the program, are not described in the literature as performing significant roles in the provision of central components of the program (Uniting NEWPIN, 2017; Mondy & Mondy, 2003). These are instead delivered by professionals.

Literature examining the characteristics of effective parenting programs is emergent at best. It is argued that effective parenting programs comprise a number of complementary characteristics. These include, parents as active partners with professionals (Cottle & Alexander, 2014); informed and built on models of social learning (Sanders & Kirby, 2015; Day et al., 2012); groups facilitated by individuals who can integrate the personal and professional in meeting parents' needs (Uwins, 2015); supporting participants' to develop self-sufficiency and personal agency (Sanders, 2008); be both child and parent focused, and being adaptive to the population being served (Bowman, Pratt, Rennekamp & Sektnan, 2010). In addition, Grindal et al. (2016) argue that there is little evidence that short course interventions for parents produce measurable gains. They argue for more intensive

parenting interventions that include regular home visits by professionals and active learning for parents.

An Australian meta-study of parent education and home visiting interventions (Holzer et al., 2006) concluded that successful parenting education programs have the following key features; targeted recruitment; a structured program; a combination of interventions/strategies; and a strengths-based approach. Parenting supports which have several components (group work, home out-reach, components for children, therapeutic back up) are considered more effective than single-issue designs (Moran et al., 2004; Moran and Ghate, 2005). Furthermore, research has shown that parenting education is more effective when parents choose to be involved; commit to the process; understand the value of their own skill development for their children; have the necessary resources and support to access and complete the intervention; and, have the support of those close to them to engage with the program (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003). However, the literature generally indicates an overarching perspective that some parents need to be taught how to parent.

The premise that individuals need educating or need to be trained in parenting is problematic as it potentially discounts, others, marginalises and presents as deficit those it is intended for (Lam & Kwong, 2014). For example, a critical analysis of traditional approaches to parenting 'education' illuminates a challenge about how power, authority and knowledge are exercised and perceived by those who are involved in 'educating' and those being 'educated' (Lam & Kwong, 2014). It is argued that the very notion of educating parents is evidence of the professionalisation of parenting and characteristic of middle-class values and opinions being pushed on to working class parents in what has been called by Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2014) 'roll-out neoliberalism'. These authors argue that this attempts to shape individual citizens, and the ways in which they were parented, from a perspective that parenting is a context-free skill which disregards the multiple influences and circumstances that impact on parents and parenting (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). It has also been argued that it is irrational to approach the support of parents who are struggling with parenting by coaching them in the parenting practices of more affluent families, particularly for families living in poverty (La Placa & Corlyon, 2016).

It is evident that parents are more likely to engage in parenting interventions with those they know and trust (Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin & Berry, 2012). This provides a

challenge to many traditional expert led models of parenting education. A reconsideration of parenting program facilitation could lead to approaches that enable parents to learn directly from others like themselves who can understand and empathise with their lived experience. This implies that trust and familiarity are necessary in the process of building relationships between parents and those who provide parenting interventions. In a recent systematic literature review, Bozic (2017) refers to current widespread corporate trends of behaving in ways that depletes the trust of consumers. Bozic refers to the need for 'consumer trust repair'. Bozic's synthesis of the literature identified that trust repair involved consumers experiencing tangible reparatory evidence such as organisational restructuring, a preparedness to compensate where necessary, and endorsement of a trusted third party. The concept of 'consumer trust repair' provides a useful insight into what might be effective in the provision of parenting interventions for parents who have struggled to trust parent support services.

Given the evidence of historical power imbalances between professionals and parents in communities characterised by disadvantage, building trusting and equitable relationship between parents and professionals is likely to be complicated (van Houte et al., 2013; Gladstone et al., 2014).

2.12 Relationships and the (im)possibility of reciprocal relations

An emerging narrative through the literature demonstrates the potential harmful effect of power imbalances as experienced by those people who are least powerful (Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Standing, 2011; Freire, 2005). This identifies an ongoing challenge for professionals working with parents who experience significant disadvantage. They are challenged to provide services worthy of parents' trust and, where necessary, restore relationships with parents who are disengaged from services.

A relatively new concept offering new ways of conceptualizing this work is relational agency (Edwards, 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2011; 2012; Nuttall, 2013). Relational agency is concerned with the purposes and conditions of joint action in relationships (Edwards, 2007b). The concept resonates with, but is quite distinct from, the previously discussed concept of linking social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Relational agency draws attention to the benefit of practitioners being able to recognise, acknowledge and utilise each other's expertise in working towards a common goal. It is defined as "…a capacity to

align one's thoughts and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations" (Edwards, 2005, p. 169). Forms of practice such as relational agency challenge traditional siloed approaches in favour of working together across disciplines and drawing on resources that can be distributed across a system to support shared work (Edwards, 2005).

Edwards proposes the complementarity of relational agency, common knowledge and relational expertise, as these are mediating factors for inter-professional practice (2011). Relational expertise enables the professional to attune their responses to complement the practice and expertise of other professionals they work alongside (Edwards, 2011). Edwards (2011) refers to these three factors as 'gardening tools' that can help enhance collaboration across disciplines.

Edwards draws on the Vygotskyian Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a complementary theoretical lens through which relational agency can be further investigated and understood. CHAT proposes that we are not only shaped by our worlds but also shape our worlds (Edwards, 2007b). Since its emergence in the 1920's, CHAT has evolved through theoretical phases in helping understand the culturally mediated nature of human activity, the individual as part of collective activity, and multiple interacting systems of activity and the boundary-crossings between them (Engestrom, 2001). Edwards (2007a) cautions that the shared intent in joint activity and shared goals across disciplines can be influenced by tensions relating to institutional resistance, boundary erosion and relative power. These tensions arise from relational agency calling for a very different organisational structure that incorporates rules that facilitate and support relational engagement (Edwards, 2010).

The concept of relational agency has been predominantly used in reference to a practice dynamic that exists between professionals. This concept can help contextualise relationships between people who are engaged in the same practice whilst being positioned differently (Edwards, 2010). This concept may be useful in understanding collaborative interactions between professionals, across disciplines, and with parents, when working together in the provision of parent support interventions. Edwards (2007b) makes brief reference to the possibility of relational agency being involved in relationships between clients and professionals working together in less hierarchical service environments.

However, Wong and Sumsion (2013) argue that authentically negotiated practices between professionals and families cannot be entertained without first addressing the sophisticated dynamic of power relations between the two.

However, relational agency also has the potential to contribute to efforts to reconceptualise the relationships between parents and professionals (as co-workers), particularly in relation to the alignment of individuals' interpretations arising through their joint action. It helps validate the role of parents within a parenting support context requiring professional workers to understand the active contribution of parents as bringing a valued body of expertise to the partnership.

An approach to describing inter-professional collaboration is explored in a growing body of literature that calls for relationships between parents and professionals to reflect the notion of partnership (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Fowler, Dunston, Chiarella & Rossiter, 2012; Hopwood, Day & Edwards, 2016). The concept of partnership has become somewhat problematic due to the ambiguity in its conceptualisation (Pinkus, 2003) and has been considered a discourse, rather than a practice (van Houte et al., 2013). Terms like 'partnership' are used widely, as if a panacea, through which society's problems can be solved (Pinkus, 2003), but often with limited definitional understanding between partners. Cottle and Alexander (2014) argue that whilst professionals view good partnerships as a hallmark of quality work with parents, partnership continues to be enacted and understood in different ways.

A critical consideration in the literature relating to partnership with parents is awareness of how power is employed in parent/practitioner relationships. Indeed, the literature acknowledges the difficulties professionals experience in their partnership practice including supporting change for clients and the task of balancing the use of expert knowledge whilst working towards a partnership (Fowler et al., 2012); and the difficulties associated with professionals meaningfully sharing decision making with parents (van Houte et al., 2013). Recent literature has conceptualised partnership work between parents and professionals as opening the door to practices that develop and use knowledge with clients. This enables responses to be better aligned to new understandings that emerge through their shared work (Hopwood, Day & Edwards, 2016).

Taking into account the previous discussion about the multiple influences on parent/practitioner relationships, it becomes clear that a reconceptualisation of partnership between service providers and parents is warranted to understand how power might be renegotiated in such relationships. The complementary concepts of relational agency, common knowledge, and relational expertise proposed by Edwards (2011) referred to earlier, offer potentially useful resources for reinvigorating the notion of partnership and rendering it a more robust concept. These concepts might help more clearly articulate the characteristics of partnership between parents and professionals in the parent support context.

Whilst there is increasing knowledge about the nature of partnership within helping interactions, there is a gap in the literature. Studies that examine the characteristics of parent/professional partnerships in the co-design of parenting interventions will help address this gap.

Partnerships require time to evolve over the life of the relationship and through a series of developmental phases (Fialka, Feldman & Mikus, 2012). Likened to a dance, Fialka et al., describe the phases in the partnership development process as 'colliding and campaigning', 'cooperating and compromising,' and finally 'creative partnering and collaborating' (2012). As a relationship develops, trust and rapport can increase, and the relationship may evolve to reflect partnership through agreed goals and shared responsibility. Hopwood (2016) points out that the concept of partnership between professionals and parents does not imply a symmetrical relationship, but does require a mutual negotiation and respect for the knowledge the parent contributes given its importance to the process.

Partnership between professionals and parents stands in strong contrast to an expert model of practice regularly experienced by parents in their encounters with professionals in many current service provision models. The expert-led model of service provision assumes superiority and enables the professional to dominate (Hopwood, Day & Edwards, 2016). An expert paradigm of practice gives the professional responsibility for the outcome with the parent, who, as the recipient of the professional's decisions, is rendered comparatively redundant (Pinkus, 2003). Paradoxically, research shows that expert focused practitioners may believe they are working in a participatory way with a parent whilst

inadvertently reinforcing the very practices they believe they are challenging (Brookfield, 2001).

Despite the possible advantages of working from an expert model, including being economically efficient, straightforward, predictable, and affirming for the professional (Davis & Day, 2010), momentum is building in recognition of the benefits of respectfully negotiated processes, reflective of partnership, in supporting families (Gladstone et al., 2014). This signifies a shift from the traditional top down, prescriptive, expert model of helping to two way relationships involving genuine reciprocity (Cahn & Gray, 2004). Such a profound shift in traditional professional/parent relationships requires conditions and structures that empower and support each party to understand and contribute to shared learning practices that are fundamentally different from traditional parent/professional relationships.

2.13 Policy and service conceptualisations of accessible parent support

Australian federal, state and territory governments continue efforts to make services more applicable and coordinated for particular groups and communities. A current example is the Federal Department of Social Services list of preferred evidence-based programs (Communities for Children facilitating partners evidence-based programme profiles, 2016). In this context, evidence-based status arises from each listed intervention having a sufficient evidence base to be considered approved for funding under the Australian Government's Communities for Children initiative. As previously observed, this western trend of 'evidence-based practice' drives particular kinds of research practices and methodologies, with a particular emphasis on evidence gathered in artificially controlled studies that do not match the realities of practice (Green, 2006).

It can be argued that the quality of a parenting intervention in one community is not necessarily replicable in other contexts (Coyne & Kwakkenbos, 2013). Despite this, some parenting interventions have experienced significant growth. For example, broad dissemination of the Triple P parenting intervention continues across a vast array of cultural and demographic contexts. However, global growth of Triple P has been put into question. It has been claimed that evidence of Triple P effectiveness is based on small, underpowered, statistically improbable conclusions (Coyne & Kwakkenbos, 2013) and lacks rigour (Vandenbroeck, Boonaert, Van Der Mespel & De Brabandere, 2009). Nonetheless,

emphasis placed on evidence from randomised controlled research has led to a privileging of research evidence gathered through traditional 'scientific' research paradigms. This has led to the further marginalisation of qualitative research. Consequently there is a lack of data from parenting interventions specifying the lived experience of participants and the detailed enquiry into the intimate workings and impact of these programs. Arguably, this further promotes the 'expert' model of parent support. It discounts the potential for the definition of evidence based parenting interventions to be diversified and expanded. Without more diverse research evidence, there is little for innovators to draw on in rethinking parent support.

In the context of early years focused services, a growing body of literature calls for a reconsideration of how they are delivered to meet the increasingly diverse needs of communities, particularly those children and families experiencing disadvantage and stigmatisation (Vandenbroeck & Geens, 2010; Whalley et al., 2010; Fox et al., 2015). For instance, in the context of early childhood education, it has been recently argued that teachers need to actively move beyond the safety of traditional teacher- led practices to enable respectful dialogic engagement with families whose lives may be very different from their own (Chan & Ritchie, 2016). At a broader system level, recent Australian literature places emphasis on integrating programs and services, enabled by policies that address the structural barriers to integration (Nolan & Nuttall, 2013; Wong & Sumsion, 2013). Conceptual frameworks that aim to achieve collaborative and integrated service methodologies require the support of complementary practice frameworks that enable inter-disciplinary and interagency models of collaboration.

New service models that endeavour to respond to emerging policy discourses are emerging in the early childhood sector. One such model emanating from a key Australian early childhood research institute is 'Platforms – A service redevelopment framework' (Centre for Community Child Health, 2009). It proposed a theoretical framework of change for the re-development of early childhood services which involves three areas of action:

1. Building more supportive communities.
2. Creating a better coordinated and more effective service system.
3. Improving the interface between communities and services.

The third area in particular requires a high level of engagement and partnership between services and families. As previously discussed, this is still not commonly reflected in practice between services and alongside community stakeholders, particularly in relation to the design of services. This indicates the possible complexity of mobilising partnership between service and the communities they aim to support. A high level of shared understanding, shared decision making (Davis & Day, 2010), and trust (van Houte et al., 2013) between community members and professionals is required to enable different ways of working together. Such change requires more sophisticated approaches to support sustainable and effective practices. One such emerging theory to support such work is practice architecture which has been defined as the identification of "…densely interwoven patterns of saying, doing and relating that enable and constrain each new interaction, giving familiar practices their characteristic shapes" (Kemmis, 2009, p. 466). Hopwood et al., (2013) argue that practice architecture illustrates how the process of changing practice is not just about individuals improving their knowledge and skills, but also necessitates individuals and context are not treated separately. Hopwood's assertion directly challenges current policy and organisational approaches to service design and implementation in communities characterised by disadvantage. The concept of practice architecture (Kemmis, 2009) provides a useful framework for identifying and reconceptualising the sayings, doings and relatings of the changed practices, relationships and contexts. This approach enables meaningful and effective co-design relationships between professionals and parents. However, significant policy changes are still necessary to enable a shift from traditional expert deficit perspectives to practices that result in more responsive and sustainable solutions for families (Fowler et al., 2012).

Whilst there are many theoretical perspectives about the complex issues inherent in the provision of services for families and communities characterised by disadvantage, there is little documented research focused on parenting interventions provided in partnership with parents living in communities characterised by disadvantage. Only in recent years have alternative approaches to engaging service recipients in the design and delivery of services been evident in the literature (Dunston, Lee, Boud, Brodie & Chiarella, 2009; Whalley, Riddell, John & Hannon, 2010). Despite the strong arguments for services to change the way they engage and work with families who struggle to access early childhood services (Wong & Sumsion, 2013; Parker & McDonald, 2010; Katz et al., 2006), an enduring

deficit view of parents is widely reported in health and education (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005). Such perspectives are evident even in practitioner behaviours during interactions with clients (Forrester et al., 2012). Van Houte, Bradt, Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie (2013) found a tension between professionals' desire to involve parents in partnerships with them and the workers' belief that parents lack the capacity to act in their children's best interests. Tensions of this type may lead to a conclusion that practitioner/parent partnerships cannot achieve equality but perpetuate perceptions of inequality (van Houte et al., 2013). It is useful to consider these tensions from the perspective of parents who are experiencing disadvantage. They may already be experiencing feelings of shame, ambivalence and lack of confidence (Forrester et al., 2012). It is often the same parents that are expected to encounter practitioners in service environments they perceive to be unfamiliar and unfriendly (Chenhall et al., 2011).

Despite the possible tensions the parent/professional relationship withstanding, there are increasing calls in the literature for new ways of working with families. This demands closer attention. There has been insufficient qualitative research focusing on the impact of parent support interventions on parents and their families. Given the valuable insights parents can contribute from their own diverse lived experiences, it is necessary to understand what might enable parents to contribute to the co-production of new ways of learning and working alongside professionals in parent support service contexts?

2.14 Parents and professional workers: Partners in an active learning community

Learning is a social process situated within cultural and historical contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). One such social learning theory, 'communities of practice' has been defined as "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Wenger (2010) has described a community of practice as the simplest social unit that reflects a system for social learning. The concept of communities of practice places emphasis on the social process of interactions and learning that occur. These result in structuring the relationships amongst the members of the learning community (Farnsworth, Kleanthous & Wenger-Trayner, 2016).

In some group contexts, voices can be silenced by power and learning can be compromised. However, within a community of practice, despite the varying levels of competence and expertise, there exists potential for a levelling of traditional hierarchies through members working across boundaries and learning together (Farnsworth, Kleanthous & Wenger-Trayner, 2016). This less formal form of learning requires both participation and reification – that is, the bringing of something abstract into being. Wenger (2010) argues that a form of reification in communities of practice is seen in the interplay of participation and use of common 'artefacts'. That is the use of stories, tools, resources, concepts and words that are shared between people in a community of practice. Over time, this shared practice creates a learning history that helps individuals recognise their contribution to a community of practice. However participation in such a community, without the anchor of a shared artefact, may lack coordination and not be sustainable (Wenger, 2010).

Communities of practice and social capital have been examined together within contexts such as organisational management (Lesser & Prusak, 1999) and learning through information technology (Daniel, Schwier, & McCalla, 2003). However, the two have not been discussed as complementary frameworks for parent learning and skill development within a context of a peer-led parenting intervention. Parenting concepts, and ideas may function as common 'artefacts' and be the focus for participation between individuals in such a social learning context and help define it as a loose but effective community of practice. In addition to the benefits for individual parents arising from such a social practice, their shared learning might also help strengthen social capital in a broader community context.

Within the context of programs of parenting support, the application of communities of practice has the potential to provide a useful vehicle for promoting a culture of shared learning between parents and professionals, where purposefully shared reflective behaviours are practiced. The resource brought into play through communities of practice seems well suited for underpinning a capacity building approach to strengthening parent/professional relationships, through which both groups have the potential to become active co-learners within a mutually beneficial reflective relational paradigm.

2.15 Reflective behaviours: Sustaining change in parenting and professional practice

Reflective behaviours have been shown to be influential in supporting change in the parent child relationship (Slade, 2007). The notion of reflection as a purposeful learning practice, emanates from the work of Donald Schon in the 1980's and the concept has been widely adopted across human service disciplines including education (Loughran, 2002; Xie, Ke & Sharma, 2008), health (Mantzoukas & Jasper, 2004), and parenting support (Day, Ellis & Harris, 2014; Hunter & Meredith, 2014).

Reflective practice can contribute to the development of new understanding for the reflective practitioner (Edwards & Thomas, 2010). A more rigorous scrutiny of one's practice is necessary as reflection and practice are essential aspects of the one process (Edwards& Thomas, 2010). Paulo Freire, an eminent critical theorist, wrote "Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly." (Freire, 2005, p.60). The practitioner must call on more than their past practice experience to recognise opportunities for practice change (Loughran, 2002). However, there remains confusion among practitioners about what reflective practice entails (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

Reflective practice has become a 'buzzword' which inevitably results in understandings becoming oversimplified (Thompson & Pascal, 2012) and the value of the practice being diluted. Despite the potential benefits of reflective practice, some applications of reflective practice in health, education and social work have encountered criticism. These include its oversimplification due to an absence of theoretical rigour (Thompson & Pascal, 2012); being treated simplistically as a set of abilities and skills that can be taught to practitioners to develop and educate others (Edwards & Thomas, 2010); and, the potential for unsupported self-reflection to create problems for the practitioner's professional and personal development (Yip, 2006). It has been argued that such practices undermine reflective practice and contradict the original emancipatory intent of Schon's seminal concept (Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

Despite the aforementioned potential for reflective practice to be misinterpreted in professional settings, the incorporation of reflective practices in parenting interventions has been recognised as beneficial (Hunter & Meredith, 2014; Slade, 2007). Significantly, it

has been shown that the reflective behaviours modelled by educators in a parenting education context can be carried into participant's own parenting (Eames et al., 2010). Through practice the reflective practitioner may incorporate an unconscious process of 'reflective functioning' which is involved in interpreting human action and interpersonal contexts (Fonagy & Target, 1997). In order to sustain reflective practices, parents and professionals require mechanisms and structures that help keep reflective behaviours practiced. One such approach emerging in the literature focuses on coaching parents to achieve self-determined parenting goals (Allen & Huff, 2014; Kruenegel-Farr, Allen & Machara, 2016). This area lacks theoretical and empirical research (Allen & Huff, 2014) and like parenting education models, is focused on guiding parents to increased competence and confidence. Despite the reflective partnership intent that is implicit in a coaching relationship, the notion of coaching parents still implies a perceived parenting deficit that is addressed through the knowledge and expertise of the coach.

Whilst reflection is viewed as a key coaching method, the notion of reflection as an explicitly shared reciprocal learning process between parents and parent group facilitators remains largely unexamined in the literature. Despite that reflective practices are acknowledged in the literature as integral to effective parenting programs (Clauss-Ehlers, 2017; Hunter & Meredith, 2014; Slade, 2007), evidence of the efficacy of shared reflective process between parents and parent facilitators in the delivery of parent education interventions is needed. Such evidence may help provide a foundation for the development of different kinds of relationship between parents and professionals, for example enabling parents to contribute to services, rather than being passive recipients.

2.16 Engaging parents as more than service recipients

Recipients of services, commonly referred to as 'consumers' have traditionally only been enabled to make minimal contribution to the design and delivery of services (Boyle, Coote, Sherwood & Slay, 2010). In many parent support contexts, the parent is viewed merely as a recipient who benefits from the skills, knowledge and expertise of the worker. This reflects Freire's 'banking model' of education (2005) in which the learner is pictured as the empty vessel, into which the superior knowledge and expertise of the teacher is decanted. This unbalanced power dynamic can be regularly reinforced through organisational processes and practices that inadvertently avow power and authority over the 'client', 'service user' or

'consumer'. Bizzell (1991) referred to this use of power as 'coercive' where power is exercised over others for one's own benefit.

In the context of delivery of human support services, Dorothy Scott argues that even common descriptors of the service recipient (service user, consumer) imply a power dynamic that begins from a premise that the recipient takes away, consumes, or uses resources (Scott, 2013). However, in an emerging body of thinking, Kemmis (2017) argues that emancipatory education is more than just challenging and dislodging oppressive practice but also, in the current global climate characterised by multifaceted crises, education is a wellspring of hope. He argues that through education one can hope to increase peoples' capacity for self-expression; self-development; and ultimately self-determination (Kemmis, 2017). This critical perspective on education helps conceptualise the possibility of parents not just participating in parenting interventions, but being engaged with services to the extent they may become co-deliverers of parenting interventions. Cottam (2018) questions; "What would happen if we gave families the support and resources to take the power into their own hands, to build their own way out?" (p. 62). Cottam argues for authentic engagement with parents. This helps to rediscover the original intention of services in order to reinvent them for our time (Cottam, 2018).

Despite broad use of the term 'engagement' in the provision of parent support services, there is still no clear definition of engagement (Gladstone et al., 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Engagement has been variously defined in terms of 'involvement', 'collaboration', 'compliance' and, 'participation' (Yatchmenoff, 2005).

Engagement requires dialogue across groups with potentially diverse opinions, identity, power and influence. To this end, an emerging body of literature focuses on a concept called 'dialogic engagement' which promotes dialogue across diverse groups that are willing and able to articulate their demands in order to act jointly (Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Taylor and Kent (2014) argue that most of the narrative about engagement in a public relations and dialogical civic engagement context, positions engagement as a verb, described from an organisational perspective and applied as a form of one way communication with the public (Taylor & Kent, 2014). The same authors assert that those involved in dialogic communication and engagement have to balance the task of negotiating relationships with multiple stakeholders, whilst at the same time progressing

organisational interests and objectives (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Taking this concept further, in the context of mentoring new teachers, it has been argued that whilst dialogical approaches certainly require some form of relationship, they also require reflection, space and time (Talbot, Denny & Henderson, 2017). As such, working dialogically is not about sharing dialogue and transmitting information to others, but requires a purposeful process of shared new meaning making (Talbot et al., 2017). So whilst the literature is in agreement that relationships appear to matter in engagement processes, the question 'what is the nature of the engaging relationship?' is less well specified and deserves closer attention.

From a parenting and early childhood community development perspective Whalley et al. (2010) help define principles of successful and sustained engagement with families. They discriminate between service practices that view engagement with families as something aspirational versus practitioner behaviours and service policies that authentically place parents and families as co-producers of process focused on shared service design, program implementation and delivery, and governance (Whalley et al., 2010). The implications of this provocation are significant as parents' participation in many Australian parent support services is still limited to that of recipient of services and interventions.

2.17 Co-production and Co-design: Theoretical discourses or common practice?

The concepts of co-production and co-design have been employed to describe the characteristics of desired relationships between consumers and service providers (Fowler at al., 2012; Coen & Kearns, 2013; Dunston et al., 2009). It is argued that engaging families who are viewed as 'service resistant' in the co-design, implementation, delivery, research and governance of programs and services is an effective approach to building trusting relationships with them (Whalley et al., 2010). Moreover, new terminology has emerged in an attempt to grapple with the nuanced complexities that give meaning to the shifting constructions in relation to working in partnership with parents. As previously discussed, terms like 'empowerment', 'individual/community capacity building' and 'engagement' have been birthed or rebirthed in recent times. Subtle tensions have arisen as such concepts evolved with terms such as participation, involvement and engagement being used interchangeably resulting in misinterpretation of what they could mean in practice (Coen & Kearns, 2013). Concepts like co-production and co-design are increasingly being used in service narratives to illustrate the priority given to working in partnership with people who

are recipients of the same services. Whilst these concepts have been useful in moving the field away from expert driven, power infused service delivery, they have been found to be insufficient, or inadequately supported and fall short of their promise when implemented in practice. For instance, Martin (2007) contends the term 'co-production has been used cynically by governments to dress up tokenistic consultative processes as evidence of being in touch with, and closer to the citizen. Sometimes the concept of co-production is viewed with suspicion by public officials as potentially threatening their professional judgement or democratic legitimacy (Martin, 2007).

2.17.1 Co-production

The concept of co-production emanated from the work of Edgar Cahn during the 1970's and 80's in the area of public administration and was originally concerned with the interaction of the third sector in the provision of public services (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). Co-production has been described as a framework and set of techniques used by organizations to recruit active client participation in service programming (Cahn & Gray, 2004); where people who use services contribute to the production of them (Needham, 2009); and "…delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours" (Boyle & Harris, 2009, p. 11). From a public service sector perspective, co-production has been viewed as a necessary cultural shift to address inequity and the perceived and real distance between service users and deliverers (Boyle et al., 2010). Given its perceived focus on increased citizen participation, the concept of co-production might be viewed with suspicion by some as a neoliberal mechanism benefiting from the continued subjugation of vulnerable groups. This approach is strengthened and evidenced by the shift away from government responsibility and decreased social welfare. This shift can be viewed as evidence of neoliberal influences that increase competition and self-reliance of citizens, (Millei & Lee, 2007).

Dunston et al., point to a post-neoliberal reimagining, given recent discourses on active citizenship and emphasis on the citizen's place as a co-producer, in an array of public processes and functions (2009). Within the context of health services, there is evidence of increased focus on involving community members, and the everyday service user, by making them more central in key decision-making functions (Dunston et al., 2009). Notions like co-production need to be re-examined and reconceptualised within the context of

democratic interventions that aim to support subjugated groups of people from being the recipients of services to being the co-deliverers of the same interventions.

The concept of co-production is still used predominantly in the public administration and health services sectors. However evidence of genuine attempts to implement it in practice with previously disengaged families is limited. Only recently has the literature began to conceptualise co-production as an active dynamic in the design and delivery of parenting focused services (Fowler at al., 2012; Coen & Kearns, 2013). Parent support services have traditionally been conducted by professionals trained in expert frameworks with a specialist focus on the identification and prescription of solutions to address perceived deficits in the presenting family (Sousa & Rodrigues, 2012). Considering co-production within health services in Australia, requires a substantial shift in which the health consumer moves from being a traditional 'passive recipient' of care to the 'new consumer' who is viewed as contributing their own valuable experience and expertise across the system (Dunston et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is a need for research that might inform a reconceptualised or re-visioned approach to parenting support in which power relations are considered and are genuinely more consumer driven.

2.17.2 Co-design

Co-design is a more recent concept to emerge in the human services literature. Victorian Council of Social Services (2015) emphasises that the practice of co-design represents a change in service methodology and is more a way of thinking than a process. Co-design has also been referred to as 'co-creation': "the practice of developing systems, products, or services through collaboration with customers, managers, employees and other company stakeholders" (Ramaswamy & Guillart, 2010). In recent years, there has been movement towards service 'users' being consulted in the design of services to enable multiple perspectives and the benefits that flow from co-design (Steen, Manschot & De Koning, 2011; Magnusson, Matthing & Kristensson, 2003). However, co-design case studies tend to be limited to the private sector where motivation for co-design with 'customers' and 'service-users' is likely to be driven by potential productivity and profit increases (Ramaswamy & Guillart, 2010), or 'value add' for customers (Magnusson et al., 2003). Despite the collaborative intent of co-design, it is limited to consumers' involvement in design with the final product being implemented by the professional, whilst co-production involves the traditional 'consumer', in both design and implementation (Freire & Sangiorgi, 2010).

In the context of service improvement and innovation in health care, it has been argued that the "co" in co-design implies a partnership that values co-leadership and sharing of perspectives on level terms between patients and health professionals (Bate & Robert, 2006). However, Bate and Robert (2006) concede this would require dominant traditional approaches to health care provision to make room for such approaches.

Recent research in relation to co-design conducted by Yip et al., (2016) focused on participatory design between parents and children in developing social media learning tools. Their research emphasised the importance of first facilitating social bonds between those involved in a co-design process. They also found that individuals interact in different ways in co-design activity from passive observation through to more active involvement and conclude that stakeholders may need to feel comfortable and some may need more support to be involved than others (Yip et al., 2016). Therefore, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders for collective co-design activity requires that attention be given to the building of social bonds and mechanisms that enable shared understanding in relation to how work can be undertaken between those involved.

From a policy and system perspective, the aim of working more collaboratively with families and between services is to enhance health and well-being outcomes for children. To maximise the benefit of such practices within and across disciplines and organisations, it is argued that collaborative efforts reflect relationality and a sense of belonging to 'place' (Duhn, Fleer, & Harrison, 2016). Collaborative practices between professionals and parents in a given area need to focus primarily on relationship building across stakeholders and strengthen a sense of belonging experienced by all involved. Collaboration that occurs within a shared co-design process with parents will endeavour to improve the capacity of parents to not only be competent in providing care for their own family but also enable them to develop networks and skills that may benefit their families in other areas.

2.18 Practice implications of co-production and co-design

If parents and professionals work alongside and learn from each other, the professional worker needs to possess the necessary qualities and skills that enable and support such a reciprocally beneficial learning relationship. Katz et al., (2006) argue that the personal efficacy of the individual worker, and their attributes, significantly influence the service's ability to engage with families in a non-stigmatising way. This helps shift the focus within

parent support to a service culture that promotes democratic co-construction of service with children and parents as active autonomous individuals (Vandenbroeck, Roose Bouverne-De Bie, 2010). Yip et al., (2016) conclude that for this to occur, relationships between professionals, parents and children require social bonds to be established and nurtured. Their assertion magnifies the complexity of the relationship development process in moving from a possible position of mistrust and suspicion to a respectful, collegial relationship characterised by the co-design and co-delivery of alternative service approaches.

The notion of engaging parents in processes that characterise co-production and co-design of parenting interventions shows potential for development and deserves further exploration. These concepts challenge traditional service approaches to parent support and call for a rethinking of how organisations involve parents in parent support interventions.

2.19 From consumer to contributor: Rethinking the parent/worker dyad

Despite a predominance of expert led parent support interventions, recent literature posits an emerging trend towards frameworks of practice that attempt to promote more democratic and collaborative practices between services and the families they serve (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009; Bowman et al., 2010; Davis & Day, 2010; Roose et al., 2012).

Expert models of practice are in stark contrast to emerging models of family-centred and strengths-based practice in which being 'parent-led' is an overriding principle (Braun, Davis & Mansfield, 2006). Whilst there is little research evidence, particularly in the Australian context, about the processes and impact of such approaches, they work from the premise that the family know themselves and their children better than the program practitioner, and bring a complementary body of knowledge and expertise to the encounter (Ortega & Coulborn Faller, 2011). The parent's unique knowledge and experience in relation to their personal situation and their community and cultural contexts (Swick, 2004) can make a profound contribution to individualized service interventions. A family's knowledge and experience of their own ecology is a central consideration within contemporary practice frameworks in Australia such as 'Participatory Family-Centered Help-Giving' (Dunst & Trivette, 2009) and the 'Family Partnership Model' (Davis & Day, 2010; Day, Ellis & Harris, 2014). Practices that engage parents in decision-making and how they will acquire information, skills and resources, can have a positive effect on parents' own sense of

competence and confidence (Trivette & Dunst, 2005). A mutually beneficial partnership can ensue within such practice frameworks. Such practice frameworks promote a sharing or minimizing of power (Coady & Lehmann, 2008; Gladstone et al., 2014), shared purpose, mutual respect, and a negotiated process through which both parties learn and ultimately change. In the literature, there is an absence of such a reflective learning dynamic between parents and professionals. This is symptomatic of expert led dominant approaches to parenting education that can position parents as lacking in these capabilities, and as 'receivers' or uncritical consumers of 'expert' knowledge.

In this review of the literature, a trend is evident towards the potentially transformative effects of service models and practices that reflect what Cahn and Gray (2004) referred to as acts of helping that become two-way transactions. Relationships that result from interactions of reciprocal giving and learning enable the parent and worker to view themselves as co-contributors and active partners in learning. In considering the significance of such a shift in practice, Freire offered a challenging alternative to traditional constructs of hierarchy and power in contemporary services;

> "We … must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes and fears – programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours." (Freire, 2005, p.96)

Such practices will demand transformed practices and policy contexts in order to achieve authenticity and emancipatory structures of support, for the most marginalised people, enabling them to "…feel like masters of their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions…" (Freire, 2005, p. 124).

Whilst much has been written in the European context about the adoption of collaborative practice frameworks (Davis & Day, 2010; Sousa &, Rodrigues, 2012), and the benefits of dialogical interaction between parents and professionals in reconceptualising parent support (Vandenbroeck, Boonaert & van der Mespel & De Brabandere, 2009), the literature is largely silent in relation to parents as active participants in, and agents for, changed practice within a system of services. Some attention has been given to the influence of parent led approaches on service users (Day et al., 2012) and benefits for the parent

workers themselves, including relationships with their children (Thomson, Michelson & Day, 2014). However, there remains a need to understand the contribution parents can make in co-delivering and reconceptualising new models of parent support alongside professionals, particularly in communities where services encounter difficulty engaging families and how these might work in reality. As outlined earlier in this chapter the benefits of healthy familial and social support for parents is well documented. The capacity for these networks to evolve into semi-formal vehicles for teaching, learning and reflection between parents is not as well understood.

People are more likely to choose to be engaged in activities or processes to which they have some connection or interest (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). This is particularly so when people have a sense of ownership in the design of an activity or intervention (McDonald, Coover, Sandler, Thao & Shalhoub, 2012). The individual worker's skills and behaviours have been recognised as an important ingredient of relationships between professionals and parents that enable a high level of engagement (Gladstone et al., 2014). However, there is a gap in the literature in relation to engaging parents in the development and delivery of parenting interventions, particularly in communities characterised by disadvantage.

Heath and Palm (2006) asked whether there is room in the parenting education arena for both academically trained practitioners and locally trained mentors and para professionals. Their question arose from the not uncommon practice of rationalising the use of locally sourced mentors by highlighting the anticipated advantages of mentorship. They caution that doing this must include carefully defined roles and boundaries whereby professional workers and para-professionals can work in complementary ways that result in improved outcomes for parent participants and their families (Heath & Palm, 2006). This highlights a need for professionals' perceptions of parents, and their practices, to be transformed in order for a new form of authentic partnership to emerge whereby parents and professionals can work together and learn from each other (Chiapparini, 2016).

Organisations, and those who work within them, require the necessary knowledge, values and skills to work in collaboration with parents and professionals from other disciplines (Scott, 2010). The possible transformative practices for both workers and parents that could emerge from such practices in an Australian parent support service context have not yet been adequately explained.

In the context of social work practice, Chiapparini (2016) proposes the need for a 'gap mending approach' whereby gaps between users of services and workers are addressed through a two pronged approach including education of workers and a focus on service user participation. Resonating with a Freirean perspective of emancipatory education, Chiapparini argues for a potentially empowering relational learning environment whereby professionals and service users learn from each other (2016). Heeding Chiapparini, it is evident there is little research documenting such initiatives and research in this area would go some way to providing much needed evidence about the impact and benefits of such programs and how they work in practice.

2.20 Summary

This literature review provides an important perspective on the current challenges regarding the democratic enactment of parent support and identifies important new and relevant resources that help inform studies in this area. In particular it highlights the potential contribution of new qualitative studies that might usefully inform progress in the field of parent support. This chapter highlights the lack of evidence in relation to parents' participation within the service system as co-deliverers of parenting interventions. Reviewing the literature suggests that in addition to structural and policy changes, service systems need to find ways of shifting away from traditional expert deficit models that aim to address immediate problems (Sousa & Rodrigues, 2012) or those that attempt to change non-standard families to be like the standard middle-class family (Chenhall et al., 2011). However there is little research documenting where this has been effectively implemented in the Australian context and in the communities characterised by disadvantage.

The literature is saturated with examples of professionally designed and led parenting interventions, with little attention given to the possibility of parent involvement in the design or delivery of interventions. However, in light of the complex issues that result in many families being disengaged from the service system, an emerging body of literature calls for new approaches to the design and provision of services. This includes recognition of the benefits for families through increasing positive social support and relational networks that reduce parents' stress and create informal learning opportunities through which parents can support and affirm each other (McConnell, Breitkreuz & Savage, 2011). However, there is very little material that provides rich descriptive data of how this can be achieved.

This literature review has highlighted the problematic nature of family support services, the lack of evidence regarding the opportunities for parents and professionals to co-deliver support to parents, and the potential use of current theoretical resources for redressing some of the problems and challenges that have been identified.

Given the level of international investment in parenting education and support programs further research related to the potential contribution of parents in the provision of parenting interventions is needed (Day, Michelson, Thomson, Penney & Draper, 2012). Evidence of the effectiveness of peer-led parenting education in the Australian context is an obvious gap in the literature. The literature assembled in this chapter represents sociological, socio-cultural and ecological perspectives that, together, indicate a range of possibilities as to how this might be achieved.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This in depth study of the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parent intervention demanded careful attention to the methodological approach and the research design. This was particularly pertinent in this research context where the participants resided in communities that were identified as vulnerable and were experiencing or had recently experienced challenges in their parenting. The research was designed to explore their experiences and the changes that occurred in their parenting behaviours and social relationships resulting from participation in a peer-led parenting program. The study also aimed to critically examine the implications of these changes specifically and ultimately for providers of parenting education interventions.

This chapter identifies the research questions and provides a rationale and description for the research methodology, a description of the research approach, as well as associated issues and details of the study design. This includes issues such as recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, and limitations of the study.

3.2 Research questions

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an extensive body of research literature that indicates the desirability for relationships between parents and professionals in family services to reflect partnership (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Davis & Day, 2010; Fowler et al., 2012). This is particularly relevant to the provision of parenting programs (Turnbull, Blue-Manning, Turbiville & Park, 1999; Day et al., 2012). However, whilst the concept of partnership with parents has been extensively discussed and theorised, the notion of parents as partners with professionals in the co-delivery of a parenting intervention has not been given adequate attention in the research literature.

This study therefore examined the experiences of parents who participated in a peer-led parenting intervention. The particular intervention, described later in this chapter is distinctive amongst parenting education as it is targeted towards communities

characterised by disadvantage and engages, trains and supervises parents as facilitators of a 'peer-led' intervention. This approach is in contrast to nearly all parenting education programs in Australia that are manualised, expert led interventions. Therefore, a close examination of participants' experiences of a peer-led parenting intervention has the potential to provide rich insights into the provision of an alternative approach to parent education in Australia and how it impacts parent participants.

As discussed in chapter two, a combination of factors such as non-nurturing environments, the complex circumstances and networks in which many parents find themselves, and wider family and social issues are not always conducive to facilitating strong health and well-being outcomes for many children (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1994). All parents need the skills, tools and support networks that enable them to parent with confidence. The insights from this study have the potential to inform an emerging body of literature about the possible transformative effects for both parents, and services, arising from community members and professional workers working together and learning from each other in loosely formed communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998). With this aim, this study addressed the following research question:

What insights do the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting intervention provide for approaches to parenting education and the provision of parent support services?

Throughout the research process, three secondary questions also emerged that offer depth and breadth to the research findings;

- What are the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting program?
- In what ways do the experiences of parents' participation in a peer-led parenting intervention influence their parenting and their relationships?
- What insights can the parents' experiences provide for program designers, policy makers and service providers?

Almost all interventions have a degree of impact on those who participate. However, this study was focused on participants' perceptions of the impact of their participation in the intervention on their relationships with their children and others close to them and how the experience might provide insights that could influence provision of parent support services.

Given the unique focus of this study on participants' experiences of a peer-led parenting program, this research provided the opportunity to deliver new insights and identify potential challenges for those involved in the design and delivery of parenting interventions for families experiencing adversity.

3.3 Methodology

This study focused on the participation of parents in a peer-led parenting intervention being delivered in some of Tasmania's most disadvantaged communities. In this research, the participation of a broad cross section of parents living in those communities shaped the approach to the study and its design. The cohort of potential participants helped inform and identify a methodology most suited to gathering personal, contextual and relevant data that best addressed the research questions.

Given the nature of the enquiry, a qualitative methodological framework was considered appropriate to research parents' perceptions of their experiences arising from participation in a parenting program and to address the research questions (Willis, 2011; Mack et al., 2005). Qualitative research enables the generation of finely-grained data that can provide nuanced understandings of participants' experiences, perspectives, their meanings and implications in this context. This is especially valuable in a study in which participants' experiences may vary greatly given differences in personal backgrounds, life experiences, and history of interactions with parent support services and interventions. Research that attempts to examine these types of participant experience is enhanced through the application of a methodology that is ethnographically informed. Ethnography emerged during the twentieth century as an approach to studying human social life (Reeves, Kupr & Hodges, 2008). This study can be described as ethnographically informed research given its interest in human social life but conducted by a researcher without complete immersion in the contexts of those who participated in the study. Whilst the researcher had previously worked in the communities where the research took place, and was familiar with the types of issues many families encountered in these communities he did not personally have experience of the challenges many of the research participants in this study described.

All qualitative research must seek to communicate 'authenticity', 'plausibility' and 'criticality' (Brower, Abolafia & Carr, 2000). The study adopted an interpretivist approach in order to take account of how "...knowledge is valid if it is authentic, that is, it is the true

voice of the participants…" (MacNaughton et al., 2001, p. 36). An interpretivist research paradigm invites the researcher to be concerned about subtle complexities as they emerge through many levels of analysis and description (Black, 2006; MacNaughton et al., 2001). Through the data analysis process the interpretivist must look beyond examining only what has occurred to try and understand how it has happened. (Lin, 1998, p.167). Given the complexity of extracting authentic and plausible knowledge from observations and the personal accounts of others, it was important to incorporate strategies that enabled the researcher to triangulate research methods that could provide the rigour necessary to draw credible conclusions (Smith & Kleine, 1986) and maintain the potential afforded by rich qualitative descriptions.

The researcher sought to uncover the conscious and unconscious explanations that participants had about their beliefs, cultures and customs and how these might have influenced their lives (Lin, 1998). This inevitably would include some level of generalisation and it would be rare that a study does not contain any form of generalised claim (Williams, 2000). Notwithstanding the inevitability of generalisation, the reason for adopting an interpretivist lens within this qualitative study was to provide a suitable framework to capture the richness of participants' experiences in the program and consider these perspectives in the context of service provision. Such an approach has the advantage of producing rich descriptive data that is contextualised to specific situations and can be seen as indicative rather than generalisable across populations.

An ethnographic interpretivist approach influenced both the design and application of this study's methodology to help maintain a focus on the generation of knowledge that is authentic and plausible. The complementary ethnographic and interpretivist approaches are concerned with understanding lived experience and situation specific meaning from the perspective of others who are living the experience (Schwandt, 1994). Moreover, ethnography asserts that these perspectives and experiences must emerge from detailed observations of people, and conversations with them, in their own settings (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008).

3.4 Research methods

The multiple methods employed for data collection included participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. It is argued that the ideal research

design for parenting programs would comprise a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and would focus on what we really need to know as opposed to what is easily measurable (Moran et al., 2004). Moran et al. (2004) identified that research focused on parenting support has tended to be either qualitative or quantitative, but rarely both, and as a result, unable to provide a comprehensive account of the success or otherwise of interventions. With this in mind, multiple methods were employed for data collection which included participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. The research methods employed in this study helped to generate data that provided rich and thick descriptions (MacNaughton et al., 2001) with an emphasis on understanding the participants' experience in context.

Ethical commitments of the study (discussed later in this chapter) and the necessity to fit within a given time frame to suit practicalities for accessing research participants influenced the design of this study.

3.5 Design

A number of factors needed to be considered in relation to the design and practical implementation of this research. These included identifying study participants and where they could be drawn from, how data could be collected, and mitigating risk.
These are addressed in the following sections.

3.5.1 Study participants

The participants' of this study were predominantly parents who were also participants of a parent led parenting education intervention. This included parents participating in the parenting intervention and parents facilitating it. In addition, a small group of professional workers involved in supervising and administering the parenting intervention contributed to the study. A full description of the intervention is provided in the section 3.5.4 'environmental context of this study'.

General data gathered as part of the Tasmanian parent led parenting intervention indicated that the majority of research participants would;

- be mothers living in communities identified by formal data sources as disadvantaged (Kids come first report, 2009);
- have one or more children between the ages of 2 and 11 years of age; and,
- identify as experiencing difficulties in their parenting.

The information about previous participants in the peer-led intervention was useful in the formulation of the research design, and selecting suitable environments and approaches to data collection. Of particular significance were issues relating to gender and related ethical implications for the research process and data collection. These issues are addressed later in section 3.8 'ethical considerations'.

Participants in this study comprised a number of different groups including 36 parents and two professional workers. The 36 participants in the study included 31parents who were enrolled in a parenting intervention and five parents who were accredited facilitators of the parenting intervention. Two professionals involved in the management of the parenting intervention also participated in this study. The research methods used to collect data from participants are outlined below.

3.5.2 Data collection methods

This study used a multiple methods approach to data collection. This approach supported the exploration and examination of participant's interpretations of their experiences in a peer-led parenting program. To ensure the integrity of the research, the triangulation of data sources was applied. This added rigour to analysis and ensured sufficient data was collected to enable different stakeholder perspectives to be identified. MacNaughton et al., (2001) suggest that triangulation of research methods can be used as a way of demonstrating the authenticity of individual responses and as a means of checking for consistency or contradiction from other data sources. Triangulation of data adds to the validity of findings in acknowledgment that validity arises not from the data itself but the inferences drawn from them (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The research design included the following data collection methods:

3.5.2.1 In-depth interviews

In depth interviewing within a qualitative research framework is a method that has attracted significant attention, with an increasing onus on the researcher to demonstrate how quality has been maintained (Roulston, 2010). Roulston describes validity in a research context as "the truth, trustworthiness, or accuracy" of a researcher's claims (p. 201).

In adopting one-to-one interviews as a valid research method in this study, interviewer skills and integrity, individual interpretations, as well as question design and validity were

important considerations. All interviews were semi-structured and between 30 and 60 minutes duration. With the written permission of participants, each interview was audio recorded and electronic records were stored in accordance with ethics requirements. Fourteen of the participants participated in one or more semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Sample interview questions are documented in Appendix three.

The analysis of interview data occurred as an iterative process commencing early and continuing throughout and beyond the data-gathering phase. This process helped inform the researcher's approach to subsequent data collection and was enhanced by the flexibility to frame and pose questions that might not have been anticipated prior to commencing the data collection. Through the series of interviews, the researcher tailored specific follow up questions for each participant to seek further insights, ideas or perspectives based on analysis of data from previous interviews. This process is recognised in the literature as an acceptable approach to gathering qualitative data (Chenail, 2011; Silverman, 2010; Mack et al., 2005).

Consistent with a strengths-based framework of practice, the researcher approached each interview as the 'student' (the researcher), eager to learn from the 'teacher' (research participant) (Mack et al., 2005). The interviews set out to identify participant's perceptions, or as Silverman (2010) puts it, their own "model of reality" (p. 6). Chenail called this the 'insider's perspectives' (2011). In order to attempt to understand others own reality or perspectives, it is often necessary to carefully frame and pose subsequent questions that help unfold meaning (Davis & Day, 2009).

It was anticipated that data emanating from the in-depth interviews would provide rich and thick descriptions of participants' experiences and perceptions, both at the intervals in which they occurred and through subsequent interviews. The one-to-one interviews provided participants' descriptions of their daily lives (family functioning, social and intimate relationships, parenting experiences) and helped provide important contextual information relating to experiences of families living in communities in which the research was conducted.

Parents' accounts of participating in a peer-led intervention were gathered through engaging participants in one-to-one interviews, on up to three occasions. The intervals at which interviews occurred included prior to and immediately following the intervention, as

well as a third interview two months later. Consideration of ethical issues relating to gender and power informed the selection of appropriate environments for the interviews. A total of 27 interviews took place. The majority of interviews were conducted by telephone. The remainder were face-to-face interviews at the Child and Family Centres where the parenting intervention was facilitated. When interviews were conducted via telephone, the researcher called the phone number provided by the participants at the time they enrolled in the study.

3.5.2.2 Self-administered questionnaires

Questionnaires are a common method employed in multiple method qualitative studies as they can contribute time specific and quantitative demographic data to a study. Questionnaires provide contextual information that can help validate themes or conclusions emerging from analysis of other data sources. Although there is debate in relation to the validity of including quantitative methods within a qualitative research design (Bryman, 2006), convincing rationales also justify and validate such an approach (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). These authors suggest that where coding of both qualitative and quantitative data is possible, this method can support analysis of data for both convergence and contradiction. Such methods extended the scope, breadth and range of inquiry in this study enabling the application of different methods to separate components of the study as suggested by Greene et al. (1989).

The intention of using questionnaires within this qualitative study was primarily to gather general information about the parents who participated in the parent led parenting intervention. This included parent and child ages, number of children and family structure. The questionnaire also sought general responses from participants in relation to why they had chosen to participate in the parenting intervention and their views of themselves as parents. The questionnaire also asked participants to rate using a Likert scale, their responses to a number of open statements about their social connectedness and their relationships with their child(ren). The questionnaire was piloted with a small group of parents and professionals participating in the same parenting intervention, outside of this study to test the questionnaire for ambiguity and identify the range of possible responses from parents (Williams, 2003). An example of the questionnaire developed for this study is included in Appendix 4.

The questionnaires were explained and distributed to consenting participants prior to and following the intervention by professionals supervising the peer-led parenting intervention. Participants completed the questionnaires at two intervals. This enabled participants to provide insight into whether they had changed their perspectives over the course of the parenting intervention. This was the only component of the data collection that did not directly involve the researcher.

3.5.2.3 Participatory observation

Participant observation is a common ethnographic qualitative research method. It contributes to the research design in providing "...insights into contexts, relationships, behaviour" (Mack et al., 2005, p. 15). It invites the researcher to encounter the participants in their own environment. Through observation, the researcher can gain insight into the variety of contexts that influence participants' perceptions and behaviours. "...the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an 'insider' while remaining, inevitably, an 'outsider'." (Mack et al., 2005, p.13). These authors highlight participant observation as integral to the iterative, back and-forth process of qualitative research when used alongside other research methods (2005). Participatory observation is said to enable participants to bring their own voice to the research process and potentially provide an efficacious mode though which complex situations and relationships can be understood (Clark, Holland, Katz & Peace, 2009).

Participatory observation is inherently complex as the researcher is challenged with the dynamic of participating in a process that is the subject of the observation whilst capturing or retaining necessary data for later analysis. Furthermore, objectivity of the researcher can easily be challenged when immersed in content and process. This challenge can be managed through the researcher clearly defining the objective of their participation (MacNaughton et al., 2001).

In this study, the researcher's immersion in the content of the parenting intervention, its content and delivery, was necessary to appreciate the parents' experience in a more holistic and finely nuanced way. Observation of four of the eight sessions that comprise the parenting intervention enabled the researcher to position himself as closely as possible to the context from the perspective of parent participants. The participatory observation also enabled the researcher to witness and experience the style of facilitation adopted by the

trained parent facilitators. It also helped provide information relating to the physical service environment in which the intervention occurred, and the supervisory framework that supported the parent facilitators. The template utilised for writing detailed field notes during and immediately following participatory observation sessions is included in the Appendix 5.

Protecting the identity and confidentiality of all participants and minimising disruption to the group exercises, were important considerations in the task of collecting data through observing the peer-led parenting course. The researcher was careful to ensure that the process of participatory observation did not influence the intervention. This included the researcher limiting his contribution to activities and discussions and waiting for participants to invite his input.

2.5.2.4 Research reflective journal

The researcher adopted a routine of purposeful, reflective journaling at regular intervals throughout the data collection and analysis phases. In most instances this occurred following in-depth interviews with participants, participatory observation sessions, ad-hoc work based encounters with participants, and periods of intense data analysis. It is understood that reflection and writing as a valid qualitative research method of inquiry, helps give clarity and enables articulation of ideas around research design, analysis and interpretation (Ortlipp, 2008). Additionally, the research reflective journal provided another source of data that contributed to triangulation of data sources. It provided an avenue for capturing informal, subtle but pertinent thoughts and ideas that may have otherwise been lost.

As discussed earlier the methodology of this study was described as being influenced by an interpretivist framework. As such the researcher allowed his assumptions and perceptions to be made visible to the reader and his values to be scrutinised (Ortlipp, 2008). The researcher maintained a reflective research journal recording his reactions, analysis of situations, and questions arising from the research process. This process is known to help the researcher to become aware of their thoughts, position and feelings in relation to their own learning that can occur through the process (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017).

As a method of data collection, reflective journaling enabled the recording of any introspective reactions or experiences that may otherwise have being lost (Watt, 2007).

Such experiences and realisations arose from the ongoing and incidental reflective processes of the researcher. The process of reflective journaling was employed by the researcher as a task specifically associated with the iterative process of data analysis as well as a strategy for capturing his personal thoughts, opinions and reactions to particular issues as they arose in the research process. This source of data contributed to the overall analysis process and assisted the researcher to be transparent and critically self-reflect (Ortlipp, 2008) by helping to draw clear distinctions between emerging research themes and the researcher's prior work based experiences and professional assumptions.

3.5.3 Risk mitigation

As with most research, there were inherent risks associated with the design and implementation of this study. These included:

- lack of participants or low levels of participant continuity in the study;
- participants discontinue their involvement in the study; and,
- unforeseen additional needs of participants.

In anticipating these risks, mitigation strategies were put in place as outlined in Table one.

Table 1 - Planning to mitigate against potential risks

Risk	**Strategy**
Participants are unable or unwilling to participate in the study	**Participant Recruitment** - Participants were invited into the study through the parent facilitators and professionals responsible for supervising the parenting course. These individuals were trusted by the participants and were able to vouch for the character of the researcher. In relation to one-to-one interviews, the design was flexible in catering for phone interviews or face to face at times that were most convenient to the participants

Participants discontinue their involvement in the study	Sufficient numbers of participants were invited into the study to address possible attrition and to enable generation of adequate range of data to inform meaningful interpretation and analysis conclusions
Participants encounter adversity as a result of their participation in the research	All participants invited to participate were drawn from a peer-led parenting intervention being facilitated within the structure of Child and Family Centres. This enabled referral access to appropriate and complementary interventions in the event of participants experiencing unforeseen complexity

Throughout the research process, the researcher received regular supervision from a panel of experienced researchers. Supervision ensured that potential risks were monitored and addressed in order to avoid the integrity of the research process being compromised.

3.5.4 Environmental context of study sites

In order to describe the procedures used in this study for the recruitment of participants and subsequent data collection, it is necessary to firstly describe the environmental context from which participants were drawn.

Participants in this study were drawn from the Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) parenting program (Penney, Wilson, Draper, Day, Kearney, 2010) which had been implemented in Tasmania since 2011.

EPEC is a peer-led parenting intervention program of the Centre for Parent and Child Support (South London and Maudsley Health Service, Kings College, UK). The Tasmanian EPEC project was funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation (TEYF) and implemented by the Centre for Community Child Health (Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Royal Children's Hospital, Vic) in partnership with the UK authors.

The aim of the EPEC program is to increase community access to effective parenting support through a peer-led group intervention. This intervention had been shown to

improve parent-child relationships and interactions, increase participants' confidence in their parenting ability, and reduce child disruptive behaviour and other problems" (Day et al., 2012). The EPEC model operates from a premise that parents find it less stigmatizing and more supportive to attend parenting groups run by local parents, who are in very similar circumstances to themselves.

EPEC comprises three distinct tiers of activity and training involving parents and professionals. The foundational level training is the Being a Parent (BAP) Course which is facilitated by trained parent facilitators and supervised by a trained professional. The next tier of activity is the EPEC Parent Facilitator Course facilitated by trained professionals. The third tier is additional assessment that BAP parent participants and parent facilitators can undertake linking their learning to formal competency standards in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. VET sector training is designed to provide technical training for adults wishing to attain specific skills and expertise relating to a variety of workplaces and industries.

All sites that utilised the EPEC intervention required an initial induction for professionals to be trained in the content of all tiers of the model thus preparing them for the delivery of parent facilitator training and supervision of parent facilitators. Table Two outlines the tiers of training activity involved in the EPEC program and the duration of each level.

Table 2 - The tiers of training in the EPEC program

	Participants	**Duration**
Foundation level training - Being a Parent Course (BAP)	8 to 12 parents with one or more children aged between 2 and 11 years. Facilitated by 2 parents (paid) who are supervised by a trained professional.	An introductory information session followed by 8 x 2.5 hour sessions
EPEC Parent Facilitator Course	Parents who completed BAP and satisfied all assessment tasks apply to become parent facilitators. The parent facilitator courses prepared 8 to 12 trainee parent facilitators with the skills and knowledge to co-facilitate the BAP course for other parents.	10 x 6 hour sessions over ten weeks

VET competency training	Participants of the BAP (foundation level) and EPEC parent facilitator level training complete assessment tasks linked to VET qualifications	Self-paced supported learning
EPEC Supervisor Training	Professional workers in the EPEC hub received training to prepare and supervise parent facilitators to undertake their work within the EPEC intervention.	6 days

All participants in this study were either parents undertaking the BAP course (foundation level training), parent facilitators of the BAP course, or professionals involved in the coordination of EPEC and supervision of parent facilitators.

3.6 Procedure

At the commencement of the data-gathering phase, a research work-plan was prepared to guide and manage the process, ensuring time frames were maintained and research participants were engaged at appropriate intervals. A common research procedure was followed in relation to participant recruitment and data collection. The steps taken in this study are described in the following sections:

3.6.1 Recruitment of research participants in the study

The Coordinator of the Tasmanian EPEC program supported the recruitment of research participants by promoting the research to the parent facilitators and parent participants. This support enabled the researcher to brief parent facilitators and professionals prior to the study commencement and included an overview of the:

1. research project;
2. requirements of participants and facilitators, and;
3. recruitment process.

Recruitment of participants, and the successful establishment of the data-gathering component of this study, was reliant on the process being sensitive to the needs of prospective study participants. The recruitment strategy, outlined below, reflects a series of protocols that were developed and adhered to in order for participants to trust and feel comfortable within the study.

3.6.2 Research protocols

Professionals who were involved in the provision of EPEC helped develop the following protocols as strategies necessary for creating the appropriate context for participants' initial engagement with the study.

3.6.2.1 Developing research project literature for participants and other stakeholders

An information sheet that explained the research, its intent, and what it would ask of participants was provided to participants at the time of course enrolment. (See Appendix one) Given the low adult literacy rates in the targeted communities, in many cases it was necessary for the course facilitators to read this form to participants.

3.6.2.2 Meeting with EPEC staff

The researcher met with the EPEC professionals and parent facilitators to provide an overview of the research intentions and methods. The researcher also sought their support in promoting the research and facilitating access to parents as prospective research participants. Those who were not in attendance at this session were contacted individually and the same details were explored and discussed.

3.6.2.3 Informing participants about the research project

All prospective participants were informed of the research project through the BAP course information / registration sessions that preceded the commencement of each course. Prospective participants were given written information about the research and had the research project explained to them by professional workers. This included what the research entailed and how they could choose to participate. Where necessary, the professionals managing EPEC read the information to the prospective study participants.

3.6.2.4 Identifying research participants

Parent facilitators who facilitated the initial BAP course information / registration sessions informed all participants who had consented to be involved in the study that their participation would be confirmed through the completion of an information and consent form (See Appendix two). Prospective participants had a further week to consider the invitation to participate in the study. Information provided to all interested course participants outlined the ways they could participate in the research, including a series of one-to-one, in-depth, semi structured interviews or completing a pre and post course questionnaire

The participants were informed that participation in the study was entirely optional and did not in any way influence their participation in the EPEC program. It was reiterated to parents opting to participate in the study that they could choose to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any point. Participants were given the contact details of the researcher's supervisor in the event they needed extra information or wished to register a complaint or grievance about their experience participating in the study.

The same process outlined above was followed with the participants of Group Three who consented to be observed whilst participating in a BAP course.

3.6.2.5 Initiating contact with research participants in Group One

BAP course participants who had consented to be involved in Group One of the research project were initially contacted by phone. If they were unable to be reached by phone, a message was left for the participant thanking her for agreeing to be contacted in relation to the research. A request was also made that they nominate a convenient time for the researcher to call to discuss the research, possible participation and future steps if she chose to continue. In the event there was not a message bank, the researcher made contact with the potential research participant through the EPEC professionals to arrange suitable times to be contacted.

During the initial phone conversation, the following details were discussed and clarified with the participants;

- Had they received the research information sheet at the BAP course information session?
- Did they understand the content of the information sheet?
- Were they aware that they could withdraw consent at any time without having to provide explanation for their withdrawal?
- Did they have any questions about the research, its requirements or processes involved?

During the initial participants were also informed of the nature of the interview(s) they could choose to participate in.

The discussion with prospective participants in relation to the interviews included:

- Where would they prefer the interview(s) to take place (the local CFC or over the phone)?
- Did they understand the researcher's request to audio record the interview(s) including confirmation that they granted written consent for this to occur?
- The researcher described the confidential nature of their participation and the steps that could be followed in the event of a grievance.
- Were they still happy to proceed? and,
- Would they like to nominate an appropriate time for the initial interview?

3.6.2.6 Contact with participants in Group Two

The researcher did not have direct contact with research participants who consented to participate in the research by way of completing a pre and post BAP course questionnaire. The process of informing this group about the research and inviting their participation and consent was the same as outlined previously in steps three and four. The professionals who had agreed to support the study facilitated both the participant consent process and data collection. All identifiable information collected through the consent process was gathered and stored in accordance with human ethics requirements outlined in the human ethics application process.

3.6.2.7 Initiating contact with participants' in Groups Three, Four and Five

Participants' who consented and participated in Groups Three (BAP course observation) and Four (parent facilitators of BAP courses), were introduced to the researcher by the EPEC professionals. The two participants' in Group Five were the same EPEC professionals that supported the facilitation of contact with parent participants in the study.

3.6.3 Data collection process

All participants of this study were involved in one of the five groups. The structure of each group was determined by the nature of the involvement in the parenting intervention (parent participants, parent facilitators or professional staff) and by their individual choice in relation to how they preferred to be involved in the study.

Table Three outlines the data collection method applied to each group. A rationale as to why each method was deemed appropriate for each participant group is also documented:

Table 3 – Groups of research participants and data collection methods

Group	Description of group	Data collection method	Justification for data collection method?
1	Parents who participated in a BAP course	Study participants could choose to participate in one-to-one semi-structured interviews at three separate intervals over a four to five month period	Collecting data from Group One at intervals surrounding their participation in the course helped garner participants' perceptions about their current family situation, approaches to parenting, existing social and services networks, and changes that might occur during this period
2	Parents who participated in a BAP course	Study participants could choose to participate by completing a pre and post course questionnaire	This strategy enabled the collection of quantitative data (family structure, size, average ages of participants and their children) and basic qualitative data from a larger sample of participants (perceptions about their current family situation, approaches to parenting, existing social and services networks)
3	Parents who participated in a BAP course with no overlap of Groups One or Two	One group of BAP course participants agreed for the researcher to participate as a Participatory observer to every second session of one course (Sessions two, four, six & eight)	Participatory observation of every second session of a BAP course provided the researcher with critical information relating to the context of a peer-led parenting intervention from the perspective of parent participants. This strategy provided insight into the environmental settings in which participants interacted through BAP courses
4	Parent facilitators of the BAP course	Parent facilitators of the parenting intervention could choose to participate in a one-to-one semi-structured interview	This group of participants had moved beyond basic level training to achieve certification as parent facilitators in the EPEC intervention. Gathering data from these participants contributed different perspectives from Groups One and Two.
5	Professionals involved in the coordination and supervision of EPEC parent facilitators	One-to-one in semi-structured interviews	Professionals coordinating and supervising EPEC activity potentially viewed the concept of peer-led parenting interventions from a perspective not considered by participants in the other groups

Interviews were facilitated with a total of 14 participants comprising seven parents participating in the parent led parenting intervention (Group One), five parent facilitators of the intervention (Group Four) and two professional staff responsible for supervision and oversight of the intervention (Group Five). In conducting interviews the following protocols were adhered to:

- All interviews were held at times and places according to the participants preference (either via telephone or face to face, business hours or after hours – phone interviews only)
- Permission to audio record interviews was gained prior to each interview
- Each interview was audio recorded with electronic audio files stored in accordance with requirements outlined in the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics policy
- All face to face interviews were conducted in CFC's during normal business hours using meeting spaces that were in close proximity to CFC professional workers to enable both safety and confidentiality
- All participants were reminded prior to each interview of the option to withdraw from the study at any point in the process without the need to provide explanation for the decision
- All participants were reminded prior to each interview of the actions they could pursue if there were any grievances or issues in relation to the conduct of the researcher or the research process

As part of the ethics application process, an interview questions template was developed (see Appendix Three). The schedule of questions provided the researcher with a guide to support the interview process for Group One and Group Four.

3.6.3.1 Data collection through use of one-to-one interviews

One-to-one interviews were used as a method of data collection for three of the five groups of participants in this study. This included:

- **Group One**

Group One participants' engaged in a series three one-to-one, in-depth, semi structured interviews. The interviews took place at two-month intervals as outlined in Table Four.

Table 4 - Intervals between Group One interviews

INTERVIEW	RATIONALE FOR INTERVAL BETWEEN INTERVIEWS
1	Prior to commencement in the BAP course
2	Immediately following participation in the BAP course
3	Two months following completion of the BAP course

Three of the Group One interviews were face to face and the remaining 17 were telephone interviews. Audio recordings of 15 of the 20 interviews were transcribed by a transcription service. The remainder were transcribed by the researcher.

- **Group Four**

All Group Four participants were active parent facilitators in the EPEC intervention who had co-facilitated a minimum of two courses each under the observation and supervision of an EPEC professional. The five parent facilitators participated in one off, one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. The same processes as followed for group one interviews were implemented for group four interviews. The audio recordings of the five interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

- **Group Five**

Two professionals involved in the coordination and supervision of BAP course parent facilitators participated in one off, one-to-one in-depth interviews. The same processes as followed for groups one and four were implemented for group five interviews. The audio recordings of both interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

3.6.3.2 Data collection through use of questionnaires

Group Two participants completed a pre and post BAP course questionnaire. The first questionnaire was completed prior to session one and the second questionnaire was completed following the conclusion of the BAP course. The questionnaire (see Appendix Four) comprised a number of open-ended questions seeking written responses and statements linked to a generic Likert scale. Participants were invited to include a unique identifier that enabled comparison of each participant's pre and post questionnaires whilst maintaining participant anonymity.

The following processes were implemented in the collection of data from Group Two participants:

- The supervising EPEC professional distributed, collected and forwarded all completed questionnaires prior to and following the completion of the BAP courses
- Where necessary, the supervising EPEC professional supported participants to read and understand the questions in the questionnaire
- Each participant completing pre and post questionnaires had a unique identifier code known only to themselves to assist with the pairing of completed questionnaires during data analysis
- All completed questionnaires were stored in accordance with requirements outlined in the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics policy

3.6.3.3 Data collection through participatory observation

The researcher attended four sessions (every second session) of a BAP course as a participatory observer. Prior to course commencement, the researcher's observation role was explained to participants by a supervising professional. All participants of the course consented to the participatory observation prior to the beginning of the BAP course and at every subsequent session. The researcher used an observation template for recording the observations during and immediately following each of the sessions (see Appendix Five).

Before the BAP course was observed, an information morning tea was held at which the research project was introduced and outlined to registering parents. It was explained to each group that a proposed research method was for the researcher to participate as an observer in the course. A group in the Hobart region consented to participate in this component of the study. The following processes were implemented in the collection of data from Group Three participants;

- The researcher sought participants' consent prior to attending each session
- Participants chose when to involve the researcher in course activities
- The observer made hand written, non-identifiable notes during sessions. These were transcribed later by the researcher. All hand written notes were destroyed following transcription. Electronic versions of transcribed notes were stored in accordance

with requirements outlined in the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics policy

Given the relationship development and trust that occurs in programs like EPEC and the degree of personal disclosure that can follow, it was necessary for the researcher to be aware of the possible influence his presence could have in the BAP sessions. For this reason, it was essential for all participants to be fully aware of the researcher's role, what it entailed, and their ability to withdraw consent for the participatory observation at any point. It was also necessary for the researcher to participate in all related activities in a way that supported the development of trust and enabled participants' opinions and decisions to guide all processes.

3.7 Trust and integrity in research

Conducting good qualitative research is a complex undertaking. Researchers will have subjective motives for carrying out particular research, and these will impact on the trustworthiness of the study (Watt, 2007). Furthermore, participants' trust of the researcher and the research process is paramount to the success of any study. Respect for individual participants' autonomy is critically important, so too is respect for any community of focus in a study, and protecting that community from harm (Mack et al., 2005).

The researcher conducting this study had sustained and regular interaction with the communities involved over an extensive period through his professional work. The researcher was known to and trusted by many early-years professionals and local community members. However, Bordeaux Silverstein, Auerbach and Levant (2006) emphasize the potential for a power variance between research participant and researcher in qualitative research. They argue that adding a research component to an existing professional relationship with a client could further increase the client's vulnerability (2006).

The researcher's professional role, and the framework informing his practice, was underpinned by extensive community (parent) engagement in the participating communities. Whilst this professional work complemented the study, the researcher's familiarity in the same communities resulted in unexpected dynamics and complexities as he grappled with balancing the dual functions of being an insider (emic) and outsider (etic)

(Pike, 1954, as cited by Headland, 1990). The potential existed for the researcher's previous professional role to lead to biases that would negatively influence the research process, its findings and ultimately its integrity. Of particular concern to this study was the potential for bias that could occur relating to individual's perceptions of social status and gender (Collier & Mahoney, 1996). Throughout the study, the researcher maintained a reflective focus on the concept of power, trust and integrity in relationships and the potential for bias to influence the process. These reflections were recorded in the research journal and explored in supervisory processes.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics standards exist so researchers can remain aware of the needs of those people they are studying, that the conduct of the research reflects integrity and the foundations for trust between study participants and researcher are established (Mack et al., 2005). The characteristics of the communities in which this research occurred, and the nature of the peer-led parenting intervention from which research participants were selected, necessitated a high level of sensitivity in the design and implementation of the research project.

Ethics approval for this study was sought through the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee (ref. 12/025210 | H9935) and approved in January 2013. Being a human research project, it was necessary for the researcher to address a number of ethical issues. One important ethical consideration was the use of power in human research encounters and the ways in which it may be influential in the study (Willis, 2011). These included power and how it influences relationships, gender inequities and individual perceptions around hierarchical power and authority.

3.8.1 Power in relationships

In conducting qualitative research, the researcher must maintain an awareness of the potential imbalance of power between the researcher and study participants (Etherington, 2007). The level of sensitivity required in the relationship between researcher and participant mirrors that of the type of relationship one would expect to see in respectful interactions between practitioner and client (Bordeaux et al., 2006). The potential for research participants to feel powerless and the resulting compliance of research participants has been known for some time (LaRossa, Bennett & Gelles, 1981).

These authors suggest that the researcher must be attuned to the power that he or she brings to a researcher/participant relationship and ensure it does not disempower the participant, undermine the relationship or damage the credibility of the research methodology.

Davis et al., (2007) refer to helpful relationships whereby the 'helper' (practitioner) explicitly articulate and model their desire to work in 'partnership' with the parent (research participant, client, child). In doing so, they argue, the helper opens the door to negotiation between the two as to how the relationship will look and work, hence modelling and reinforcing shared decision making and power.

Given the documented level of disadvantage within the communities in which this research was conducted, and the common suspicion of outsiders in such communities, it was necessary for the researcher to constantly reflect on and address factors that may have created barriers to participation in the research. Regular supervision and reflective journaling provided the researcher with opportunities to consider the implications of these ethical research issues. One such recurring issue the researcher encountered was identifying appropriate language that could be used in this thesis to help describe communities and families being discussed without contradicting core assertions in relation to the misuse of position and power.

From a critical interpretivist perspective, identifying appropriate ways to refer to communities characterised by disadvantage is problematic as common descriptions in the literature can contradict the very basis of critical argument. Recent literature focused on families and communities experiencing complex needs have used terms such as "families experiencing adversity" (Goldfeld, Price & Kemp, 2018), "high-poverty communities" (Skattebol et al., 2012), "hard to reach" families and communities (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012) and "vulnerable families" (Rossiter et al., 2011), amongst many others. Each of these descriptions are predominantly only used by those in policy, service provision and research contexts and risk reflecting a top-down, deficit focused perception of the 'other', those who are different from oneself (Canales, 2000). Similarly, in this thesis, the use of such descriptions for communities and families risk contributing to a perpetuation of academic discourses that make deficit of already struggling people. The most common terms used to describe such families and communities in this study are 'communities

characterised by disadvantage' and 'families experiencing adversity'. The term 'communities characterised by disadvantage' was offered to the researcher by two Tasmanian parents, who themselves had experienced significant adversity. Their rationale was that this descriptor did not make deficit of individual families and indeed acknowledged the conclusions that could be drawn from formal data sources. Furthermore, the term 'experiencing adversity' refers to a current state that one can move in to and out of, as opposed to a defining trait.

3.8.2 Gender and power

The interpretivist approach adopted in this study was discussed earlier in this chapter. The researcher's interest was therefore drawn to culture, context and historical perspectives in understanding what occurred through his interactions with participants. This resulted in an imperative to locate understanding through encounters with some participants in which there appeared a starkly different 'world view' between his own realities and life experiences and that of the participants'. A Freirian perspective (Freire, 2005) of such a relational tension in this research process would pose pertinent questions about the potential power imbalance in the exchange between a white, male, middle-class researcher and isolated females, parenting within complex personal situations and living in communities characterised by disadvantaged.

As outlined previously, all participants in this study were mothers attending programs in Tasmanian Child and Family Centre's (CFC) in communities that had been identified, on multiple domains, as vulnerable. In these communities, family violence, child and partner abuse, most often perpetrated by males, was not uncommon. Given that the research participants were female, and the primary researcher was male, it was critical that serious consideration be given to the notion of gender and power (Laing, 2000). The choice of appropriate environments and conditions in which to conduct the data collection phase of this study were important given the gender differences and the use of one-to-one interviews and participatory observation as data collection methods.

The researcher utilised the Family Partnership Model (FPM) (Davis, & Day, 2010) as a practice framework for guiding and informing researcher behaviours and the micro skills involved in interacting with participants. As suggested by these authors, many finely nuanced skills can be employed in encounters with research participants that assisted in

relaxing participants, putting them at ease, communicating trust and equality, and modelling respectful relationship development.

3.8.3 Perceived hierarchical authority and power

In addition to possible perceptions of gender and power imbalance, it was possible that research participants could view the researcher as representing authority or being representative of more powerful hierarchical structures that, in the eyes of the participant, had perpetuated past inequalities (Freire, 2005; Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). The researcher was aware of the many subtle occurrences in encounters with research participants that could help or hinder the process. Purposeful reflection on the effect of language used, intonation, posture, researcher attire and a plethora of micro skills connected with interpersonal relationship development, as outlined in FPM, were used as a guide (Davis & Day, 2010). The model provided a useful and readily transferable mechanism to the qualitative research context and the researcher's attunement to behaviours and environments that could influence encounters with research participants.

3.8.4 Additional support for research participants

Beyond the usual procedural issues related to ethical human research, it was essential for the researcher to consider the notion of "…ethics in practice, or situational ethics…" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). That is, what would be necessary to provide appropriate support for participants should their participation result in discomfort or harm? As Ellis (2007) suggests, the researcher remained attuned to the changing relationship between researcher and participant throughout the study ensuring that exploitation of the research participants was avoided.

The EPEC program has the potential to be a highly emotive learning experience for parent participants. Given this study asked participants to recall and discuss their experiences of the intervention, it was anticipated that participants could potentially experience complex emotions as a result of the research. It was therefore important for the researcher to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. This included being mindful of the possible impact of the research on each participant, and those close to them, and ensuring appropriate strategies were in place to help address unforeseen difficulties should they arise (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2010). Two strategies were employed in this study

to ensure the well-being of participants was supported in the event of difficulties arising through the process:

- The existing EPEC therapists continued to provide supervision for groups of parent facilitators at the time this research was undertaken. These therapists were available within the remit of the EPEC program and this extended to support study participants given their connection to that program.
- Professionals working within the CFC model, together with their transdisciplinary teams, provided an additional and ready referral point should extra support be required for participants.

3.9 Data analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis involves what Chenail (2012) calls 'abstracting' which enables the researcher to come to view things in different ways. This qualitative study was not simply a comparison between participants but rather an exploration of how participants experience and respond, over time, to the intervention. An iterative data analysis process enabled new perspectives to emerge from the data. The researcher employed a highly recursive process towards a thematic analysis of the data. This occurred through thorough immersion within the data - reading, re-reading, coding, categorizing and eventual extraction of themes (Silverman, 2011; Green et al., 2007; Quinn Patton, 2002). The data analysis process was influenced by Ecological Systems Theory and Critical Theory outlined earlier in sections 2.5 and 2.6.

The design of this study included triangulation of research methods (Smith & Kleine, 1986; Mathison, 1988; Cresswell & Miller, 2000) to seek validity of research conclusions. It was anticipated that data from five separate groups of participants, together with data from the researcher's reflective journal, would provide breadth and diversity of data sources to support triangulation in the data analysis phase.

As outlined in Chapter Two, Ecological Systems Theory, including bio-ecology (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), and Critical Theory (Freire, 2005; Agger, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1997) were two conceptually different but complementary frameworks that guided analysis in this study. According to Horkheimer (1972) different critical theories built on the work of Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer have emerged. These theories aim to explain and transform circumstances that keep people

marginalised and oppressed. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1979) provided a lens through which to consider the myriad systems and individuals within them that help or hinder all facets of human development and critical theory contributed a perspective that added depth to the ecology of human development. Critical theory questions the presence and influence of hierarchical discrimination and power across ecological systems that can inadvertently perpetuate disadvantage. The juxtaposition of these perspectives provided a constant reminder to the researcher of the stark inequities of power that are present between individuals across systems. As emphasised later in this thesis, the same inequities were sometimes highlighted in the interactions between professionals and parents. Consequently, the adoption of the two theoretical perspectives within this study caused regular destabilizing realisations for the researcher in relation to his place within discriminatory and disempowering hierarchical systems. Regular supervision enabled the researcher to identify resources and other networks to assist him to address issues as they arose.

It was decided not to use an electronic data management system as a tool for data analysis to avoid possible fragmentation of rich data as this risk is indicated in the literature (Willis, 2011) and also to ensure original meaning from the data was maintained (Roberts & Wilson, 2002). This enabled a process of 'incubation' whereby the researcher spent time letting data settle and allowed ideas to emerge as possibilities within the analysis process (Willis, 2011; Green et al., 2007).

Data were analysed to identify patterns and themes informed by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in this study. This included looking for evidentiary excerpts to illustrate important ideas and concepts while being mindful that qualitative research requires the researcher to constantly consider new interpretations of common occurrences (MacNaughton et al., 2001) as he moved through the analysis of data to an analysis of the analysis of the data (Chenail, 2012). Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to move beyond describing an interpretation of a set of categories or themes to providing an interpretation of the broader issues being investigated (Willis, 2011). Rapley (as cited by Silverman, 2011) talks about the qualitative researcher developing "…a qualitative analytic attitude" (p. 9) as a necessary step to enable the confidence that Silverman argues is necessary for the articulation of one's research arguments. The process of data immersion over an extended period, ongoing reflection on emerging themes and challenges that

emerged from the supervisory process, enabled the articulation of clear arguments from this study. An important part of this evolutionary process was the reflexive approach adopted by the researcher.

3.10 Reflexivity in research

Reflexivity emerged through this study as a recurring phenomenon and contributed in a significant way to the study's conclusions. In adopting reflexive methods in this research, the researcher was striving for the study to be understood by others as more than a process focused on the research findings, to include how the researcher arrived at certain conclusions (Etherington, 2007).

A qualitative approach to research enables the researcher to examine the research process as it unfolds and to consider the impact of themselves on the study and its findings. Chenail (2012) argues such new meaning emerges not only from data analysis but from the analysis of the analysis. Such reflexive research processes (Edwards, Ranson & Strain, 2010; MacNaughton et al., 2001) characterised the nature of analysis in this study. Over time, earlier conclusions matured and deepened resulting from continued reflective exchanges with study participants.

Reflexivity is a multi-layered, multidimensional practice that has been viewed and described in a variety of ways. It has been described as an informal and continuing process that contributes to life-long learning for the individual that takes place outside of institutionalized learning (Edwards, Ranson & Strain, 2010). MacNaughton et al., (2001) refer to reflexivity in terms of the researcher's attention to their own impact on the study. These scholars acknowledge a particularly complex approach to reflexive data analysis involving participants in checking the researcher's interpretations of the evidence (2001). Collectively they gesture towards reflexivity in research being a purposeful but less formal mechanism of discovery and meaning making.

In qualitative research reflexivity is a necessary and important element that allows the researcher to remain conscious of his or her position in the process, whilst being actively engaged in all components of the study (Willis, 2011). As outlined in the earlier discussion on power as an influential dynamic, the reflexive nature of this work influenced the data analysis of the study. Reflexive research methods were built into the design to allow for constantly changing contexts. The analysis of data involved the researcher employing an

explicit parallel process of maintaining an awareness that one's values and beliefs are certain to influence both the research process and its outcomes (Etherington, 2007). This was supported by the process of reflective journaling and the recording of ideas and thoughts as a process of enquiry that stimulates more thought in the process of knowledge construction (Watt, 2007). Reflective journaling was a constant method used by the researcher throughout the study.

In maintaining a self-reflective journal (Ortlipp, 2008) the researcher became aware of significant growth for some participants through which, they exercised newly acquired skills of reflective parenting, empathic listening, and facilitation in other parts of their lives. The growth and change evident in the narrative of past participants' was reflected in participants' addressing difficult social relationship issues, pursuing previously unimaginable employment and adult learning opportunities, and addressing long term hostile and unsafe relational situations. Only over an extended period, and sustained work based contact with some participants, could the researcher draw these conclusions. The reflexive context in which the analysis process has occurred appeared to go further than checking the researcher's interpretation of the evidence (MacNaughton et al., 2001) to something more analogous with inter-relational reflexivity proposed by Gilbert and Sliep (2009) characteristic of a joint deconstruction of power in the relationship between stakeholders. The participants' informal contribution to the analysis process could be viewed as a partnership that results in a co-constructed product with the researcher whereby the participant assumes their place as contributor rather than consumer or recipient. The researcher was confronted with the challenge of shifting his subjective constructions of study participants from that of the 'other' (Weis, 1995; Canales, 2000) to co-analysers and co-producers of the findings from this research. The process of reflective journaling enabled the researcher to constantly consider the potential influence of individual subjectivity in research processes.

3.11 Researcher subjectivity

It is not sufficient for researchers to assume that they approach their research with objectivity. Bordeaux et al. (2006) argue that a postmodern philosophical perspective assumes that both neutrality and objectivity are impossible. Therefore, it is important to outline the social position of the researcher that conducted this study.

The researcher is a parent with extensive practice history working in a variety of settings directly with families experiencing complex needs. This has included the design and implementation of programs that target parents who are disengaged from the service system. At the time of undertaking this research the researcher was the Training and Development Manager in a national community child health research centre. His role included the design and delivery of workshops and professional training for early childhood practitioners focusing on service re-development, integration, father inclusive practice, working in partnership with parents, and engaging families experiencing complex needs. Much of this work was conducted through the Tasmanian CFC's through which all the research participants were invited to participate in the study. As it was possible that prospective participants could have known the researcher through his work related activity, clearly defined processes were maintained throughout the recruitment and data collection phases, in accordance with ethical standards, to avoid the possibility of participants' feeling coerced to participate.

The dual roles of researcher and professional working in the CFC communities required the researcher to consider the issue of subjectivity in terms of data analysis. Kracauer (1952) cautioned about the dangers arising from qualitative data analysis techniques because of the indispensability of subjectivity. Throughout the study the researcher remained aware of his impact on the research process, and possibly on the outcomes, given the possibility of his close work with the research participants (Mruck & Breer, 2003).

In addition, an important consideration relating to subjectivity is the way in which individuals interpret events and what influences their interpretations. Personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) proposes the way individuals make sense of their own experiences is heavily determined by their previous experiences and their current constructions.

Kelly's theory invites the individual to be aware of one's own constructions that occur subconsciously (Fransella & Neimeyer, 2005). Through the process of construing, and making sense of experiences based on previous events and learning, the individual is led to judgments, behaviours and actions that could appear out of sync with the interpretations of others. This universal human phenomenon inevitably influences encounters between the researcher and those who contribute to the study.

With this in mind, it was important that the researcher reflect on the possible differences in perspectives between himself and study participants. The researcher remained alert to how these differences could hinder both the research process and the researcher's own interpretations. The overarching conceptual frameworks that influenced data analysis in this study therefore provided theoretical touchstones, ensuring new knowledge arising from the process was authentic, reliable and valid.

3.12 Reliability, validity and generalisability

A critical test of any research is its quality. Reliability and validity are two necessary characteristics of the design, analysis and overall quality of strong qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). If validity and reliability of a study can be demonstrated, the credible results that will follow can lead to what is known as generalisability. That is, can the findings of a given study be generalized to a broader population and therefore reinforce validity? (Golafshani, 2003). Myers (2000) argues that despite qualitative research being the target of criticism for its lack of generalisability, it should not be a primary concern of qualitative research, nor should qualitative researchers feel compelled to illustrate generalisability, because qualitative research has so many other valuable features and contributions to the area of education. Myers asserts that qualitative research aims to uncover meaning and understanding, rather than to affirm truths or make predictions (2000). The previously discussed concept of triangulation of research methods (Smith & Kleine, 1986; Mathison, 1988; Cresswell & Miller, 2000) helps contribute to the reliability and validity of a qualitative study providing the legitimacy to draw credible conclusions (Smith & Kleine, 1986). It is therefore necessary for a study to be able to defend its claims, whilst acknowledging possible limitations that could be seen to influence the research and its claims.

3.13 Limitations of this study

This study set out to explore participant's perceptions of their experiences in their involvement with a peer-led parenting intervention. The participants in this study were not broadly representative of all parents, however they were generally characteristic of those parents who choose to undertake the EPEC program. It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study are not proposed as being representative of all parents for the following reasons:

- Participants were drawn from a relatively narrow demographic, living in communities that were generally classified as experiencing significant disadvantage
- Data was collected from participants through multiple methods and analysis involved extracting rich and thick descriptions from only a small number of participants
- All research participants were female

Although this study draws conclusions about changes that occurred for participants, it was beyond the scope of the research to verify these perceptions with those individuals who may be affected by the perceived change; most notably other family members and those belonging to participants' social networks.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, it is possible the gender of the researcher may have influenced participants' contributions given all participants were female. However, the researcher sought advice to ensure the research design compensated for potential barriers related to gender. This included ensuring there were appropriate environments for all face-to-face interviews and that all introductions between the researcher and participants were facilitated by trusted female professionals. In addition, the researcher employed a regular and ongoing routine of reflection, and reflective journaling throughout the research process. This helped ensure that regular supervision meetings could include a focus on issues relating to the effect of researcher behaviour on participants' and any remedial actions that may have been warranted.

3.14 Summary

A qualitative research methodology was utilised to address the research questions pertaining to the experiences of parents who participated in a peer-led parenting program. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires completed by participants both before and after completion of the intervention, participatory observation of parts of a course, and a research reflective journal.

A highly reflexive approach to thematic data analysis that occurred throughout the data collection phase and beyond enabled the research design to adapt according to emerging themes. Data analysis involved recursive cyclical reflective process of data collection, immersion in the data and continued data collection. Analysis did not involve the use of electronic data analysis systems.

Measures were taken to address the limitations and ethical issues that became evident both in the research design phase and throughout the research process. Given the demographics of the communities in which this research was conducted, power and perceived authority in relationships became a major consideration in data collection, and analysis. This highlighted the importance of the researcher working in ways that ensured participants of the study fully understood and exercised their rights within the context of this research.

Chapter Four: Research context and data overview

4.1 Introduction

Adopting a critical interpretivist approach to this study places importance on contexts and processes of the research as these impact on the participant's contributions, and subsequent analysis of the narrative. Analysis of data in this study was undertaken with close consideration of the research context, the environments in which the research was conducted, and other possible influences on those who participated in the study. This chapter provides descriptions of the research context, the characteristics of the study participants, and outlines challenges that occurred as the study evolved. It provides an overview of themes identified through an extensive iterative process of qualitative analysis. Data is presented, together with descriptions of how the data were concurrently analysed. This chapter provides the foundation for the in depth data analysis and discussion that follows in the subsequent chapters.

4.2 Research context

The contexts in which qualitative research is undertaken can vary across the one study and the differing situations can influence interpretations (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). It is therefore salient to this study to describe the characteristics of the physical and social contexts in which the research took place. As outlined in the previous chapter, participants were drawn from the Tasmanian Child and Family Centres (CFC) communities. They were living in CFC locations (one in the north of Tasmania and one in the south), where the Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC), peer-led parenting intervention was being delivered. The Tasmanian CFC communities were characterized by significant social and economic disadvantage based on early childhood health and well-being measures across a number of domains (Kids come first report, 2009). These included, amongst others, rates of low birth weight babies, rates of pregnant mothers smoking and drinking, infant mortality rates, proportion of children hospitalized for injuries in the home, low household income. The selection of CFC communities for the implementation of integrated service models was influenced by the whole of government project 'Kids come first' (2009) as at the time, it provided the most comprehensive collation of Tasmanian data, across diverse sources, pertaining to child health and well-being. The Kids come first project represented an analysis of data collected from a variety of state agency data sources across health,

education, local government, child protection and police together with national sources such as the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), and Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data. The aim of the Kids come first project was "…to provide government and other service providers with a comprehensive way of monitoring how Tasmania's children and young people are faring and more accurately identify where action and support are needed." (Kids come first report, 2009, p.4)

Whilst in the national context Tasmanian children were, at the time, faring well on some important indicators such as low infant mortality rates, high immunization uptake and performance against the national minimum standards in relation to literacy and numeracy, there were some very concerning indicators for Tasmanian children. These included high rates of teen pregnancy and instances of mothers smoking during pregnancy, comparatively high death rates of children due to injuries, low attendance to child health checks, and increasing child protection notifications and substantiations (Kids come first report, 2009, p. 69). Available data painted a clear picture of disadvantage in a number of Tasmanian communities and in response to this trend the Tasmanian State Government announced the development of integrated, early childhood focused CFC's in the most disadvantaged communities. An overarching aim of the CFC's was "…to change how communities and government work together to better meet the needs of families and their young children" (Child & Family Centre's Project Team, 2011)

Table Five provides a demographic snapshot of two CFC communities where study participants lived and participated in the peer-led parenting intervention. The information in this table was outlined in the Kids come first report (Kids come first report, 2009). This table outlines a selection of identifiable risk factors in both communities that can negatively influence child development and parenting.

Table 5 – Snapshot of demographic risk factors in two communities where study participants lived

	Community A	**Community B**
Population **(ABS, 2006)**	Total population =4,145 Average age =32 yrs. 0–17 yrs. = 30.1 to 40 %	Total population = 6,543 Average age = 36 yrs 0–17 yrs. = 20.1 to 30%
Percentage of one-parent families **(ABS, 2006)**	≥ 20% of families = one parent families with children ≤15 yrs.	5.1 to 10% of families = one parent families with children ≤15 yrs.
State Government Housing **(ABS, 2006)**	≥20% of households = government housing	10 to 15% of households = government housing
SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage by suburb	Category 1 = 'most disadvantaged'	Category 1 = 'most disadvantaged'
Percentage of low weight births	7.1 to 10 %	≥10 %
Teenage fertility rate (per 1,000)	N/A	58.6 per 1,000
Percentage of mothers smoking during pregnancy	≥40 %	36.7 %
Mothers exclusively breast feeding at 6 weeks following birth	20.1 to 40 %	28.8 %
Unexplained absence from school (Tas. Govt. 2006 and 2007)	2.1 – 5% of school aged children = 30 or more days of unexplained absence	7.6% of school aged children = 30 or more days of unexplained absence
Children living in low-income households, by LGA (2006)	≥40%	36 %

(Kids come first report, 2009)

4.3 Characteristics of research participants

Participants of this study were recruited through the established CFC project with the support of professionals involved in the provision of services across the Tasmanian CFC project. The state-wide initiative involved the design and implementation of locally appropriate engagement strategies for families who were not participating in early childhood and parenting services.

All research participants were parents living in Tasmanian communities that had been identified as vulnerable on several domains using available data sources, and were participating in CFC programs. All but one of the participants' in this study were living in the CFC communities from which the participants were drawn. The other parent participant lived in an isolated rural setting some distance from the CFC community but was receiving parenting support from the participating CFC.

Table Six outlines the basic characteristics of the study's 28 parent participants including their family size and structure.

Table 6 - General characteristics of parent participants

Gender	All participants' were female
Age range of participants	18 – 46 yrs.
Average age of participant	32 yrs.
Average number of dependent children	2.2
Average age of children at time of research	4.3 yrs.
Family structure	• Both parents & children living in same house = 56% • Sole parent with part time care of children = 38% • Children in care of others = 6%

4.4 Research environments

The Being a Parent (BAP) courses associated with this study were provided in CFC's. These courses had a maximum of ten parent participants and two parent facilitators. Selection of appropriate environments for conducting interviews with study participants included consideration of ethical issues relating to gender, power and disadvantage. To this end, environments in which one-to-one interviews occurred were negotiated with CFC staff and the study participants. All data collection occurred either in the CFC setting or via

telephone interviews. Face-to-face interviews took place in meeting rooms within the CFC's. In addition to one-to-one interviews, data collected in CFC's included participatory observation by the researcher of one BAP course, and completion of pre and post intervention questionnaires by study participants.

4.5 Data collection

As outlined in the previous chapter, this study focused on participants' experiences in a peer-led parenting intervention called Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) which includes the BAP course and other tiers of training and support. The study sought to examine how the experience influenced their parenting roles and social relationships.

As outlined in Chapter Three, data were gathered from some BAP course participants, parent facilitators and professionals overseeing the parenting intervention. In addition, the researcher maintained a research journal in order to capture thoughts and reflections as the study evolved.

The researcher and an independent transcription service each transcribed 50 percent of the interviews (See Chapter Three, Table Six, for a description of the groups of participants). Each completed transcript was then compared with the audio content of the interview audio file by the researcher. This included concurrently listening to and reading each interview and making notes of specific observations that could be important to subsequent interpretation and analysis.

A total of 38 people participated in the study through a variety of data collection strategies (see 'Data collection methods' section in Chapter Three) including:

- 12 parents participated in this study by way of one-to-one interviews (Group One and Group Four)
- 16 parents completed a pre and post BAP questionnaires (Group Two)
- Eight parents attended the BAP course in which the researcher was a participatory observer of alternate sessions
- Two EPEC supervisors participated in one-to-one interviews.

The data collection phase occurred between January 2013 and May 2014.

4.6 Research groups

As mentioned previously, there were five distinct groups of participants in this study. This section describes the five groups of research participants and the involvement of each group in the study.

4.6.1 Group One

Seven parent participants of the BAP course commenced as study participants in this group. All seven participated in one of three separate BAP courses. Six of these participated in all three interviews and one other participated in the first two interviews only. The series of three interviews (refer to Table 4.3) with each Group One participant occurred over a period of five to six months.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 70 minutes. Interviews of study participants who participated in more than one interview generally lasted longer in the second or third round of interviews. Additionally, a few telephone interviews took longer to conduct due to interruptions the parent participants encountered from their children.

One participant was unable to be contacted for the third interview. It was later ascertained that she had moved away from the community at short notice. In total, 20 Group One interviews were conducted. 17 interviews were conducted over the phone and three were conducted face to face.

Table 7 - indicates the number of interviews per Group One participant and how the interview took place (telephone or face to face)

Group One Interviews: Conducted via telephone or face to face							
	Participant 1	**Participant 2**	**Participant 3**	**Participant 4**	**Participant 5**	**Participant 6**	**Participant 7**
Pre-course interview	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
Post-course interview	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
Two months following	DNP	FF	FF	T	T	FF	T
T = Telephone interview			FF = face to face interview			DNP = did not participate	

4.6.2 Group Two

It was anticipated that approximately 30 parents would participate in Group Two through the completion of a pre and post BAP course questionnaire. It became clear early in the data collection phase that BAP course participants consenting to participate in this group was relatively low. Only 16 participants completed both questionnaires. On investigation with the CFC staff, it was identified that very low levels of adult literacy may have contributed to participation in Group Two. Many BAP participants may have lacked the ability to confidently complete the questionnaire or seek assistance in doing so. In one community, a CFC worker adapted her approach to the distribution of questionnaires resulting in a significant improvement in the number of research participants in this group. In this scenario, BAP participants were given the option of having the questionnaire read aloud to them and were also given an opportunity to ask questions of the supervisor to clarify their understanding of questions contained in the questionnaire.

4.6.3 Group Three

The researcher attended every second session (half a BAP course) as a participatory observer. Eight participants attended the course and consented to the researcher's participatory observation. The second, fourth, sixth and eighth sessions of the BAP course were observed. Between five and eight parents attended each of these sessions which were facilitated by two parent facilitators.

4.6.4 Group Four

Group Four comprised five BAP parent facilitators. Three of the five interviews (refer to Table Eight) were conducted via phone; two were conducted as face-to-face conversations in CFC's.

Table 8 – Group Four interviews with five parent facilitators

Group Four Interviews: Conducted via telephone or face to face					
	Participant 1	**Participant 2**	**Participant 3**	**Participant 4**	**Participant 5**
	FF	**FF**	**T**	**T**	**T**
T = Telephone interview FF = face to face interviews					

4.6.5 Group Five

There were two participants in Group Five. Both were professional staff responsible for supervising and supporting parent facilitators of BAP. Group Five participants took part in one-to-one semi structured face-to-face interviews which were convened in a CFC. Both interviews occurred separately following the collection of all other data from groups one to four.

4.7 Data collection: Challenges, opportunities and adjustments

During the data collection phase, unforeseen issues resulted in some adjustments being made to subsequent steps in the data collection. These included low levels of literacy of some participants, changing time frames, and the nuanced dynamics of telephone interviews versus face-to-face interviews. Although some minor adaptations became necessary as a result of these issues, there was no evidence to suggest that these adaptations impacted negatively on the study. The high level of support and advice provided by practitioners in the CFC's during the data collection phase may have helped mitigate against adjustments to the data collection process impacting negatively on the study. Adaptations included the following;

Preference for interviews to be conducted by phone- Group One participants preferred to participate in interviews through telephone contact rather than face to face interviews. Whilst this was easier to cater for because it was less time consuming, the researcher had originally anticipated meeting Group One participants in person and in so doing build a level of trust that would put participants at ease and allow them to speak more freely about their experiences. By the third round of interviews with this group (over a four month period) only three of the seven participants opted for a face-to-face interview. They articulated their reasons for choosing a face-to-face meeting as being intrigued as to who the researcher was, what he looked like. In addition, two participants' commented on their perceived level of comfort and familiarity from the previous two interviews.

Engaging participants in interviews – Some participants experienced difficulty honouring pre-arranged appointments for phone interviews. The researcher was aware of nuanced barriers that could have created difficulty for participants to feel comfortable being interviewed for research. He sought advice from professionals in the communities from which study participants were drawn. This resulted in the researcher reminding

participants via text messages or phone calls both one week prior and the day before each interview. The researcher also encouraged prospective participants to speak with the professionals who were supporting the research if they wanted more information about the researcher or the process of being interviewed.

Familiarity between researcher and participant - Given the researcher's association with the EPEC program, two of the Group Four participants were familiar with him in his work role and the remainder knew him as someone involved in the state-wide CFC project. Prior to participating in the study, the researcher conducted a context setting conversation with each of these participants to help them understand the separation between his work role and his research role. Study participants were also aware they could seek further clarification about the researcher's role, and the research process, from the professionals that introduced the study to them.

Low participation in Group Two questionnaires - It was originally anticipated that up to thirty BAP participants would complete pre and post questionnaires. It became evident that BAP participants were not opting to participate in this component of the study in sufficient numbers. EPEC supervisors who worked within the CFC's and were trusted by participants, supported participants where necessary to read and understand the questionnaire and record their responses accordingly. This had a positive impact on the number of participants opting to participate in Group Two of the study.

Negotiating with participants about the nature of observing a BAP course - The researcher planned to be a participatory observer of every second session of a BAP course. Whilst giving consent to the research observation, participants preferred the researcher to remain physically external to the group circle process. The researcher participated in some group activities in what could be described as a negotiated role. In these instances, participant perspectives shaped the researcher's contribution. The researcher was sometimes co-opted by participants to participate in small group practice activities which enabled him to experience the activities from a participants' perspective. A typical example of this was contributing to a role-play of a parent/child interaction in which the participants were practising parenting skills and concepts covered in the BAP course.

4.8 Data overview

As outlined in Chapter Three, data analysis was conducted as an iterative process of coding, categorizing and extracting emerging themes (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003), and this continued throughout and beyond the data collection phase. Immersion in the data through repeated reading of the transcripts, listening to corresponding audio recordings, and a concurrent examination of related literature, supported rigorous analysis (Green et al., 2007). Over an extensive period, ongoing content analysis occurred guided by the research questions and informed by the overarching conceptual frameworks. Over time, definite themes emerged from the analysis of data.

As data collection continued, themes drawn from early data analysis were further validated or questioned over time as the researcher continued to conduct further data collection. The researcher's professional role through the Tasmanian CFC's resulted in him being a familiar face to many participants. As a result, there were occasions where his relationship with research participants developed as they continued to work together. Coincidental encounters with participants in CFC's enabled further informal conversations between the researcher and some participants. On occasions, these conversations helped challenge and refine previous interpretations emerging from the on-going data analysis process. By way of example; an early strong theme emerging from the data was that of increased parenting confidence and skill development. Following the period of data collection, the available data consistently indicated participants' perception of an improvement in their own parenting skill. The following excerpts offer an example of participant's perceptions of change that related to the intervention:

> …a growth occurs in a person – it's just an unbelievable confidence comes about you. Start to know yourself better. You end up in a better place as a person with better skills in how to handle things and how to talk to people and how people should treat you. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

> We do have a much happier house. There's definitely not as much yelling. We work much better as a family which has been good but it is just me and my three children. (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

At the point of collecting data, it was not possible to conclude, nor was it the aim to ascertain, if there was a lasting effect for participants or if newly acquired skills were embedded in their parenting practice. However, the use of reflective journaling enabled the researcher to compare his own perceptions through encounters with participants over

time, against the themes emerging from the other data sources. One example is the prominence of reflection as a newly acquired behaviour participants reported applying to their parenting and its contribution in transforming participants' perceptions of themselves not only in their parenting but also relationships with others, as highlighted in the following reflective journal data:

> A set of common behaviours and skills are evident in the anecdotes offered to me by participants in explaining changes in their personal approaches to addressing issues. It appears the transformation that many participants have experienced over time has, at its core, a capacity to reflect on situations and 'wonder' about the cause. Participants are nearly always able to identify that they respond differently [to these situations] given their attention to listening, watching and reflecting. (Researcher reflective journal, March 2014)

> It is common for participants to point out that the skills they had discovered in the program are useful for a wide range of situations in their lives and not just with children in their parenting role. Aileen told me yesterday she had used reflective questioning in addressing a long held issue she had with her 'overbearing sister'. She was able to calmly ask her sister's permission to share something that she had been struggling with for a long time, and invite her sister to consider the effect of her aggressive behaviour on their relationship. Aileen said something like *"I was really scared about telling her [sister] but there's no way I would have ever done this before. I just used the 'when you do this… I feel' stuff, and she listened. She really listened! She even said thanks and asked me to remind her in future times when it happens so she can change it…"* It appears that her ability to keep practicing the skills in a variety of settings keeps the behaviours alive and helps embed new skills as a part of her permanent suite of tools? (Researcher reflective journal, July 2014)

Such ongoing exchanges, and critical reflection, with study participants served to deepen the analysis and ensure the researcher's assumptions and conclusions, emanating from the process of analysis, were transparent, validated and the result of a truly reflexive relationship with study participants;

> I had an interesting conversation today with two parent facilitators (Karen and Sally). As usual they were eager to share recent events linked to their EPEC roles. They both agreed that they felt calmer in themselves and could confidently create a link between the feeling of calmness and the skills they had been sharing with parents as they facilitate the BAP courses. They asked me if this was what others found. I was able to share with them that this appeared to be true with study participants and I believed it to be linked not only to skill development but also a change in confidence. Both agreed. They explained that their changes in confidence were helped by;

- Beginning as an EPEC parent facilitator and sharing their learning with other parents,
- Experiencing success in using skills at home, and,
- Knowing that they had a group of parents and workers they could share their learning with through the CFC. "All these people are on the same journey" (Karen).

Conversations with participants in the study, as with the example above, challenged the researcher to view the research process as something shared with the participants. Conclusions could not be drawn in isolation or kept obscured from others. Neither was it appropriate to view the process as purely the researcher's work as it was the result of a collaboration with participants in the study.

4.9 Thematic analysis within qualitative research

As discussed in the data analysis section in Chapter Three, the researcher employed thematic analysis of the data involving extracting themes through a highly recursive process of coding and categorizing data (Silverman, 2010). The following section focuses on the evolution of categories and themes that emerged from the data.

Thematic analysis was applied to all data from interviews, participatory observation of a BAP course, and the Group Two questionnaires. Data from the reflective journal entries were used for capturing information in relation to context, setting, researcher's thoughts and reactions to the iterative process of data analysis.

The first step in thematic data analysis is a process called coding (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Coding is an attempt to label sections of transcripts in reference to not only what is said, but also the context in which it is said. Due to the volume of data available, the initial process of coding was extensive. In this study, transcripts and observation notes were analysed to identify all the commonly recurring words and phrases which were listed as codes. The multiple codes that were identified were then clustered into groups identified by descriptions that validated the context in which they occurred and their original meaning. For instance, 'relationships' was a very common code evident in Group One data. However 'relationships' was used by participants in reference to their personal relationship with their children, their parenting relationship, their intimate relationships, and social networks and friendships. From such groups of defined codes, categories were identified in

moving beyond a description to an interpretation of the issue under investigation (Green et al., 2007).

The following sections provide an overview of content analysis from each group in this study. Each section commences with a description of categories that emerged from the process of data immersion and coding. Where appropriate, they are accompanied by vignettes from the data that further illustrate the themes. The following sections conclude by outlining the theme that emerged from analysis of the corresponding data.

4.9.1 Group One – Interviews with 7 BAP participants

Data gathered through interviews with BAP participants at three intervals illuminated an apparent change of participants' perceptions from feeling isolated, stressed to feeling connected, calmer and more skilled in their parenting. For example, in relation to participants' perceptions of isolation, during an initial interview with a parent in Group One, when asked 'If you needed help quickly, who in your neighbourhood could you turn to?' one participant commented, "there's one [friend]. She's quite busy". Four months later during interview three the same participant reported:

> It's just a lot easier to talk to others, other strangers than it is your own family and friends. I find it hard to mingle, make friends, but with these people, I found them really easy going and easy to talk to.

Likewise, at the first interview another participant reported, "I'm living on a hundred acres up in the bush, um so, and we're about 12 kilometres from [COMMUNITY NAME]. My closest neighbour is about, oh, 750 metres." And during the third interview she commented, "…at least now I've got a good friends network".

Similar responses and changes were evident in the data from five of the seven group one participants.

Table 9 illustrates categories evident from data using the example of one participant across the three intervals where interviews occurred. The data gestures towards transformations enabled through improved networks, reflectiveness and increased confidence.

Table 9 - Categories that emerged from data with Group One participants

Group One – Categories emerging from interviews with individual BAP participants over three intervals		
Isolation "…to know whether you're actually doing a good job? How do you know? There's no one around to tell me, you know that what you're doing is the right thing" **(Angela, interview one)**	***Social connections*** "I enjoy um our kids playing together and you know, I get to make friends and have a bit of time out with them as well while the kids are playing. We can discuss things, you know, that we might be having trouble with and stuff like that" **(Angela interview two)**	***Increased learning support networks*** "Everybody parents [their children] in different ways. So no two parents are the same... you've got to sit back and look at the big picture" **(Angela, interview three)**
Complexity of parenting "She gets very angry … I don't know why she gets angry …I don't remember being as angry as a teenager but I'm yeah I do see a lot of her in me" **(Lilly, interview one)**	***Thinking and learning about child and self*** "…you forget how much they [children] sit back and take in and how much they watch and learn from us" **(Lilly, interview two)**	***Reflection as a skill for learning and changing*** "…if you just stop for a second and listen to what they're [children] saying, if you just hear them and sound it back to what they're saying to you, it just seems to make a difference." **(Lilly, interview three)**
Stress "I need not to bring out my stress, I think, out on my kids." **(Giulia, interview one)**	***Calm*** "I feel really good. I feel I'm not alone and I can go and talk to someone… I try not to um be grumpy with them [children]. I try and listen to them more' and that's what I'm trying to do… but now I'm trying to make more time for them as well and I think they appreciate that as well." **(Giulia, interview two)**	***Increased confidence*** "My confidence is growing slowly back and my self-esteem… I feel better, I feel much better… it's giving people like myself my confidence back and my self-esteem." **(Giulia, interview three)**

The parent participants from Group One articulated a journey of learning and new realisations related to their children and themselves as parents. Data gathered across Group One participants illustrated an emancipatory effect for them in coming to understand that they are 'not alone' and there are others like themselves. All Group One participants articulated a similar journey of shifting from a previous state of feeling stressed and isolated through to feeling supported, connected and more confident. The reflective nature of the intervention appeared to support participants to acquire new concepts and approaches to parenting and subsequently apply them in their own unique ways. On several occasions, participants drew a connection between thinking more about their child, listening to what they are saying and their own subsequent responses as a parent. As participants experienced the success of their reflective parenting behaviours, and shared the experiences with other parents, there appeared to be an increase in parenting confidence and a sense of calmness was observed. In turn, participants talked in stronger and more positive terms about their own perceptions of themselves as parents.

The categories outlined in Table Nine helped highlight the participants' transformative experiences within the peer-led parenting intervention. Changes experienced by participants appeared to be supported by a new support network and the application of reflective parenting skills. The following case-study illustrates the experiences of Giulia (Group 1 participant) as gathered through a series of three interviews over a sixteen week period. It illuminates the presence of the above factors in the transformative change she experienced.

Giulia's learning experience

Thirty nine year old Giulia is a mother of two young children. Having moved to Australia from Europe as a teen, Giulia endured years of feeling like she didn't fit in. Whilst pregnant she experienced gestational diabetes and, after the birth, postnatal depression. Luckily Giulia had her mother to provide the support she needed. "*All my life she has been my best friend and we talked and visited each other every day*" (interview one). At this time, her partner found work in a rural town in Tasmania, moving away from her family support and learning to

navigate the Tasmanian system to cater for the special needs of her five year old son;

> *I cry all the time. The only difficulty I have is when, for example, when we are in a hospital and you try to help them* [children] *and answer their questions when they are sick. And um, you try and not to show your emotional side or you know, like, don't cry in front of them. You know, I find it very difficult but I can't hold back my tears I'm sorry to say.* (Interview one).

Giulia found that the BAP course was an emotional experience for her. However, she was surprised to find that it drew her closer to the group of other local parents.

> *They came up to me and they understood me, what I said, and um they said if they were in my shoes, like about someone coming from a different language, they would go through the same emotions as well.* (Interview two).

Following the course, Giulia noted the change in her own self-esteem and confidence. She noticed her experience of parenting was just like other parents. She experienced connection with others and was supported through the course and the parent facilitators.

> … [with other courses] *'There's a lecturer there,' and then you're just a student, then you're just a number. Over here you didn't feel like that, you just feel like being altogether as part of one. I felt really good. I feel I'm not alone and I can go and talk to someone…. So there goes my, my self-esteem has just [laugh] going up higher yeah.* (Interview two).

Two months later, Giulia reflects on the changes that have occurred for herself and in her parenting:

> *…now we know more people who were around. Now my confidence is bigger and I know that I'm not going to be the only one if I have my kids throwing a tantrum. When [child's name] has his tantrums, not to shout at him. Go down his level, um or if he's screaming, or something's not right, I can go back and look at it and thinking, 'Hang on I shouldn't be shouting at him, I should talk to his level. … I know like four months ago I could go back, like if you played the [recordings], I would have cried all the way through the things that you have taped. Now I'm actually doing volunteer work here at the moment. Yes, [worker] asked me to be on the advisory board for the 'parents views', so that was a big thing. So yeah, so my first meeting is next week, next Monday… I felt like a hermit crab before, you know, but now I think I'm not a hermit crab anymore"* (Interview three)

Despite Giulia's unique situation as a migrant living in a CFC community, her story of transformative change is not dissimilar to other study participants in moving from isolation and stress to feeling connected, valued and skilled.

Of particular significance is the almost collective transformation of individual participant's perceptions of their isolation, stress and low parenting skill prior to engaging with the intervention to a relief of being 'good enough'. As an illustration of this, the most common phrases used by Group One participants' during interviews two and three were:

- "I'm not alone"
- "I think more"
- "I'm calmer now"
- "I'm good enough" - across the study, participants' used the term 'good enough parent' thirty seven times.

Thematic analysis of the data from Group One participants identified the overarching theme - transformative change for parents supported by reflective learning, strengthened networks, and improved self-perception.

4.9.2 Group Two – BAP participants' questionnaires

The majority of data collected in this study was obtained through semi structured one-to-one interviews and observation of a BAP course. Data was also collected through questionnaires completed by BAP participants at two intervals; prior to session one and following session eight. As described earlier, some of the data gathered from this group was quantitative enabling a snapshot of basic characteristics of parent participants. Group Two participants were asked a number of questions at both intervals in relation to their experiences as parents, their perceptions of their parenting, and what they hoped to achieve from participating in the program (see Appendix Four).

In another section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate on a Likert scale their responses to a number of statements relating to their perceptions of:

1. their social and family functioning;
2. themselves as parents;
3. their local support networks.

Participants were invited to respond statements such as, "There are people who live close by that I would trust to help me if I needed help." and "I am good at listening to my child

(ren) and hearing what they are saying" by circling which of the following responses was most accurate for them:

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

The data available from the questionnaires was a minor data source in this study. However, it was useful for cross referencing and triangulation with other data sources to help identify and validate meaning emerging from analysis of other data. Table 10 outlines Group Two participants' responses to these statements at both intervals.

Table 10 – summary of participant questionnaire responses at both intervals

Statement	**Pre BAP Likert responses**	**Post BAP Likert responses**
There are people who live close by that I would trust to help me if I needed help.	20% of participants disagreed with this statement prior to the BAP course.	The 20% of participants who disagreed with the statement prior to the BAP course, agreed with the statement following the course.
If I went away for a few days there are people who live close by that would empty my letter box.	The majority of participants (85%) either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals. The remaining participants indicated they disagreed with this statement at both intervals.	
If I needed money until payday, there are people who live close by who would lend me $5 for milk and bread.	The majority of participants (85%) either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals. The remaining participants indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement at both intervals.	
There is someone who lives close by that I could trust to look after my children if I needed to go out in a hurry.	33% percent of participants indicated a neutral or disagree response to this statement at both intervals whilst the remaining participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals	
I am happy with the amount of support I have in my neighbourhood.	71% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement course and the remaining participants indicated they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement at both intervals.	

Table 10 – summary of participant questionnaire responses at both intervals (cont.)		
Statement	**Pre BAP Likert responses**	**Post BAP Likert responses**
My neighbourhood is friendly and supportive of people who live there.	33% percent of participants indicated a neutral or disagree or strongly disagree response to this statement at both intervals whilst the remaining participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals	
If I needed help or advice about parenting I can think of at least three places I could go	All participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals	
I enjoy being a parent.	15% of participants indicated a neutral or disagree response to this statement at both intervals whilst the remaining 85% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals	
I think I am a good parent.	15% percent of participants indicated a neutral or disagree response to this statement prior to the BAP course	The same 15% indicated a neutral or disagree response to this statement following the BAP course
	The remaining 85% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals	
I am good at listening to my child(ren) and hearing what they are saying	80% of participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement prior to the BAP course	85% of participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement following the BAP course
I enjoy spending time with my child(ren)	The majority of participants (93%) either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals.	
I often think about my child's (ren's) feelings	85% of participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement at both intervals with a further 15% indicating a neutral response at both intervals	
When I am struggling with parenting, there are some skills or ideas I have that help me work things out	71% of participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement prior to the BAP course	All participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement following the BAP course

Table 10 – summary of participant questionnaire responses at both intervals (cont.)		
Statement	**Pre BAP Likert responses**	**Post BAP Likert responses**
I often find myself struggling with my child(ren's) behaviour	63% of participants indicated that they agree and a further 31% indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement prior to the BAP course	43% indicated they agree and 31% disagreed with the statement following the course
My friends or family are able to help me if I'm struggling with parenting	50% of participants indicated either a neutral or disagree response to this statement prior to BAP	25% indicated either a neutral or disagree response following the course.

The data from the Group Two questionnaires indicated that study participants experienced difficulty in relation to child behaviour. There appeared to be a change in the participants' perception of their parenting skills across the two questionnaire intervals. A significant percentage of respondents (50%) indicated they were unsure of, or didn't have help from family and friends if they were struggling in their parenting. Following the BAP course this had halved to 25% of respondents. A comparison of data across the two intervals points to an apparent shift in participants' view of themselves as being more skilled in their parenting and belonging to local social support networks that could support them in their parenting.

Participants indicated their decision to join the BAP course was influenced by a desire to learn about parenting and to meet other parents. They also hoped to be able to learn about and understand how to use parenting skills and to make friends. Following the intervention their responses to the question 'what do you think you got from attending BAP?' included statements such as "I'm not alone", "learning from other parents", "I listen more to my children", and "I'm doing things differently now".

Prior to participating in the BAP course, participants in Group Two acknowledged that parenting was difficult for them. Participants believed confidence in parenting could be supported through caring for oneself and being calm and patient. However, following the BAP course this had changed to viewing parenting confidence as requiring access to information and support. In addition, most participants had come to the realisation that one

doesn't have to be a perfect parent. Some participants indicated a sense of relief in the knowledge that it is ok to be a 'good enough parent' (Winnicott, 1953).

Prior to the BAP course, participants in Group Two were asked what good parenting looks like. Their overall responses to this question can be summarised by the following; Calm; no stress; and, happiness.

Participants' responses to the same question following the BAP course were more child focused indicating they had shifted their stance to view the question from the perspective of their children. Typical responses included:

> "Someone who is tolerant, firm, doesn't over react, yet is in control of situations."
>
> "Spending time and listening to your child."
>
> "A parent who tries their best to listen and understand their children."
>
> "Good parenting looks like a parent who is calm, listens, learns and tries to understand their children, and where there is fun for children."
>
> (Group Two BAP Participants)

Another example where participants' pre and post BAP course responses changed drastically was in their response to the question, 'What skills do you think a parent needs to feel confident with parenting?' Participants' responses to this question prior to the BAP course included;

> "Calmly deal with situations – how to discipline"
> "So that they [children] listen."
> "Feel comfortable with being a mum."
> "Not to lose your temper."
> "How to discipline fairly."
> "To be calm and comfortable."
> "Parents need to feel they are doing their best"
> (Group Two participants' pre BAP course questionnaire)

Participants' responses to a question that asked what skills a parent needs to feel confident, suggested participants' viewed parenting skills as necessary for discipline and caring for themselves. However, their responses to the same question following the BAP course

suggest the participants were able to consider the question from the perspective of what their children need from their parents. These included;

> "Be patient, tolerant and [use] humour."
> "A sense of humour, relaxed, patient and friendly."
> "Patience, understanding, tolerance, and an ability to love."
> "Listening more to my children."
> "To know that being a good enough parent is good enough."
> "Learn to control temper and have time out for yourself"
> "Support, money, a sense of humour, relaxed, patient and friendly"
> "Communication and patience"
> "Patience, understanding, tolerance and an ability to love unconditionally"
> (Group Two participants post BAP course questionnaire)

Data from the different research groups in this study was triangulated to check for consistency. For instance, the shift for participants, evident from the Group Two data, enabling them to view things from their child's perspective, was also reflected in the data from Group One where participant responses changed from thinking about the difficulty of parenting through to articulating the benefits of stopping and thinking before responding.

Following the peer-led intervention participants' responses to the question 'What skills do you think a parent needs to feel confident with parenting?' reflected an understanding that their behaviour could influence their children. Of particular significance is the shift from focusing on managing their children's behaviour prior to the BAP course to acknowledging the need for parents to exercise skills such as patience, understanding, listening and humour that could benefit the parent/child relationship. The regular use of the word humour by participants is interesting in that it has been identified as an attribute of facilitators in parenting education that helps them to be seen as credible by the participants' (Huser, Small & Eastman, 2008). Humour has also been recognised as a parenting education strategy that can help normalize situations for parents particularly those experiencing difficulty with childhood antisocial behaviours (Scott et al., 2001)

Participants' perception of themselves as parents also appeared to change across the two intervals at which the questionnaires were completed. In response to the question, '*How do*

you feel about yourself as a parent?' participants offered a mix of positive and indifferent reactions in the first questionnaire. These included;

> "I have a lot to learn."
>
> "I think I'm a good parent but do struggle with their behaviour & how they are feeling."
>
> "Good most of the time."
>
> "Worn out."
>
> "Unsure at best & depressed at worst
>
> "Good."
>
> "Mostly happy. I have my days."
>
> (Group Two participants' pre BAP course questionnaire)

Following the completion of the BAP course, participants offered more consistently positive responses to the same question about how they feel about themselves as a parent;

> "Confident, supported, good enough."
>
> "I feel better than before."
>
> "I think I'm good enough. I'm happy with how I try my hardest to meet every need I can for my children."
>
> "I try my best."
>
> "I feel much better."
>
> "I think I'm an exceptional parent in exceptionally difficult circumstances."
>
> "Good in the fact my children are well behaved, kind and have good manners and are happy and healthy."
>
> (Group Two participants' post BAP course questionnaire)

Analysis of Group Two data (refer to Table 11) resulted in categories that were reflective of those that emerged from the interviews with Group One participants. Despite the brevity of most written responses, participants in Group Two indicted a similar change in their perception from lacking parenting skills and personal isolation prior to the BAP course, through to a sense of being a 'good enough' parent with improved parenting skills and networks of support.

Table 11–Categories that emerged from pre and post BAP questionnaires of Group Two participants

Group Two – Categories	
Pre BAP course	**Post BAP course**
Parenting can be difficult Participants made frequent reference to difficulties they encountered in parenting and made comments about their difficulties in managing their own responses. Comments included; "I want to learn to control my temper." "I struggle with their behaviour." "Good physical and mental health does not come naturally in my family so I don't have very good parenting role models." "I lose my temper and want to be a better parent."	**Good enough parent** Participants made several references to the notion of being a "good enough parent" (Winnicott, 1953). This language, introduced in the BAP course, became the most common phrase used by participants in this study. Comments included; "It's ok not to be perfect." "I'm someone who isn't trying to be perfect." "I'm good enough!" "Knowing that you only have to be good enough." "To know that being a good enough parent is good enough." "I am a good enough parent."
Learn parenting skills Participants' perception of a parenting intervention indicated they expected to learn new skills to help them manage personally and parent differently. Comments included; "To learn new skills being a parent." "Get some knowledge about it." "Try to understand why my child behaves the way she does." "Help with my parenting skills." "To help dealing with ways to help my child's behaviour and to be a better listener." "Learn how to stress less."	**Parents learning from the modelling of other parents** By the end of the BAP course, participants reported the benefits of watching and listening to other parents (parent facilitators and participants) to help them acquire new parenting skills. Comments included; "Made contact with other local parents and got good living and parenting advice." "Watched how other people do things." "Listened to other parents." "I saw some mums do things that work for me."

Isolation	**There are others like me**
Whilst the questionnaires indicated participants perceived themselves to have relatively good support networks, there was still a strong indication that some participants were quite isolated. Comments included; "Sometimes I feel down. I've got no family in Tasmania." "I hope I make some friends here." "I want to meet some people." "To make contact with other local parents and to get good living and parenting advice." "I hope to meet people like me." "I don't know any people well enough to leave my kids with them. I take my kids with me."	Post BAP curse questionnaires indicated a strong level of social connectedness with other parents. Comments included; "I've connected with parents in similar circumstances." "Met new people and getting support from other parents." "I've made friends." "I'm not alone in some of the ways I parent." "I can get help from other people."

The categories that emerged from the data in Group Two indicate a shift in participant's deficit perceptions of their own parenting skills and networks of support to definite and strong positions of feeling supported, relieved, having acquired new skills from the experience of being with other parents.

The overarching theme that emerged from Group Two data was - ***Learning and changing with and from others.*** This theme compliments and validates the theme emanating from Group One data 'transformative change is supported by reflective learning, strengthened networks, and improved self-perception'.

4.9.3 Group Three – Observation of a BAP course

In order to observe and experience a BAP course, and avoid influencing the process, the researcher assumed an unobtrusive and casual approach to observing BAP sessions. This included active involvement in a mix of activities in which course participants invited the researcher to participate. These included small group discussions and skills practice activities. However, as requested by participants, when they worked as one large group, the researcher observed from a physical position external to the group. Data collected was limited to immediate observation notes (See Appendix Five for data collection template) and later journal entries. This component of the research provided a unique perspective of

the feel and 'culture' of a BAP course including the process of relationship and trust development between parent facilitators and parent participants.

In observing the delivery of a BAP course, the researcher was able to observe events which highlighted apparent differences between his own life experiences and the day to day experiences of some parents who participated in the intervention. In particular, it was obvious that lived experiences of some participants resulted in them approaching social situations differently. For example, the level of intimate detail participants' shared openly with the group about their current personal situations, went beyond what the researcher would have offered strangers in his own social and group learning experiences. The researcher also realised that such differences influenced his encounters with participants. An illustration of this point is the following extract from the researcher's reflective journal that captures what transpired at the beginning of one session:

The session commences with a short welcome back from one parent facilitator:

> Welcome back everyone. How has your time been since our last session? I have spent some time here at the CFC and one of my children had a birthday. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

Participants then began to offer their own experiences of the previous two weeks, taking turns offering;

> I've had a hell of a lot going on the last two weeks … we told [child] about his real dad. He fell apart three days later. Then on the weekend, Pop passed away, then the kids got sick and vomiting everywhere. Got the funeral on Wednesday. I've cried a lot. I hope next week is frickin better! I've got a pile of washing. What made me cry was when the three year old spilt cordial on the couch. That's when I really lost it. (Participant One, excerpt researcher journal)

Another contributed;

> I'm so tired! The kids' dad is out of work and he's doin' nothing to help out. He just adds to the problem with all his mates who are comin' in all hours of the day and night. (Participant Two, excerpt researcher reflective journal).

A series of exchanges continued between participants that described an array of personal complex problems and struggles. This event reinforced for the researcher the provocative analogy suggested by Freire (2005) in relation to conditioned behaviours of colonized or oppressed people. Participants' recounted experiences reflecting a daily reality that is indicative of isolation, and a visceral instability in physical amenity and dependable relationships (Daly & Kelly, 2015). The researcher noted further:

> The two parent facilitators, who both live in the community, listened with interest, their faces and bodies communicating warmth, empathy and understanding. They did not appear shocked or thrown by what was offered from participants as their daily reality is probably not dissimilar. (Excerpt researcher journal)

The researcher was struck by the gentle and caring responses of the two parent facilitators contrasted with his own past experiences and reactions in similar encounters with parents. Given the deficit view of parents that is known to be common amongst professionals, particularly in health and education (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005), it could be possible for such offering from parents to reinforce existing unhelpful constructions held by professionals. The unbiased and seemingly empathic responses of the parent facilitators, living in the same community, may possibly provide a buffer (through local and cultural understanding) whereby such disclosures do not jeopardise the budding relationship between the system and families beginning to re-engage with it.

Further analysis of data gathered from Group Three emphasised the importance of peer modelling and group skills practice in supporting parents to understand key concepts relating to empathic care of children. On several occasions, the researcher noted that parent participants seemed to have limited understanding and interpretations of some topics covered in the course. The example that follows, from the researcher's notes, illustrates this observation:

BAP Course Activity - 'Setting boundaries' with your child

A parent facilitator distributed five sticky stars to each participant at the beginning of the session. As the session unfolded, the facilitators gradually, and playfully, withdrew the stars from the participants (one by one) as a penalty for small indiscretions that occurred within the group:

> Katie, you spoke over Michelle. Give me one of your stars please. Erica, your phone just went off and you have broken the agreement. I want two stars for that please. (Parent Facilitator)

In discussion that followed, a few participants admitted that they actually believed they had been penalized. Their contributions reflected a level of disconnect between the activity as a learning exercise and the reality that some felt reprimanded by the parent facilitators.

As observed by the researcher, the parent facilitators' role-play of a parent penalising children, resulted in child-like reactions from the parent participants:

> I was interested to observe participants submissive responses to what was a playful role play, by the facilitators, illustrating the effect on children when they are suddenly penalized through the withdrawal of good behaviour stars. Rather than understanding the playful nature of the activity, some participants appeared startled and complied with the demands of the facilitators. Their facial expressions and posture were indicative of a child who had just been punished. (Researcher reflective journal, July, 2013)

Also of interest was the preparedness of parent participants to disclose to their peers (other participants and the parent facilitators), their reactions to being penalised. This led to humour and comfortable teasing as the group discussed the key learning points.
The researcher later noted in a reflective journal;

> Had the facilitators been professionals, I wonder if the participants would have shared so openly about their genuine belief they were been punished for minor misdemeanours? It seems that a more equal playing field between participant and parent facilitator enables a level of disclosure that might otherwise go unshared. In this instance, the learning that was realised in the discussion that followed may have not eventuated and participants might have gone away with the shame of being penalised by someone of greater authority. (Researcher reflective journal, July, 2013)

The researcher's observation and reflections questioned whether the facilitation of the activity by other parents might have provided a level of familiarity, comfort and care that enabled a more honest disclosure between the parent participants in the whole group conversation that followed the activity.

Categories that emerged from observation of a BAP course were;

- Relationship development
- Parent facilitators parent the participants, and
- Caring for each other

A discussion of the three categories follows.

4.9.3.1 Relationship Development

From the beginning of the BAP course, participants regularly disclosed difficult and complex parenting issues without appearing to experience fear of judgement from parent facilitators and other participants. The open and sharing atmosphere encouraged by the facilitation by

parent facilitators, appeared to strip away any evidence of participants' withholding personal information:

> …well my daughter is still being a bit violent and stuff but her behaviour is changing. Now I know I'm not alone (Parent 3)

Observing a BAP course enabled the researcher to witness first-hand a high level of trust being built in the social connections and relationships between participants. Participants openly discussed their new social connections as a result of the BAP experience:

> [parent name] and me, we've been getting together a bit now and doin' stuff together aren't we. Like this week we caught the bus to [shopping centre] with the little kids and we are meeting up at the school at pick up time too (Parent 4).

> Yeah we seen each other round a lot before this but now we know more and meet up. (Parent 6)

It appeared that the localised focus of the intervention (participants just from this community), the shared experience of the BAP course, parents increased familiarity with each other, and the opportunity to continue to interact with each other through the Child and Family Centre in which the intervention took place, contributed to the opportunity for participants to develop social relationships with each other.

4.9.3.2 Parent facilitators parent the participants

Beyond the life of any intervention those who participated may have new ideas and realisations arise from them, which are linked in some way to the intervention. However, such discoveries may be provoked by life events and experiences not even associated with the intervention. Throughout and beyond the data collection process the researcher maintained a reflective journal to capture his thoughts and reflections in relation to the study. The following data is an extract from the researcher's journal in relation to observation of the BAP course:

> Having observed a number of sessions of BAP over the past month I have noticed several small incidents that seem to collectively demonstrate some participants' unwillingness to demonstrate certain behaviours they would wish to see in their children. Examples of this include;

- During a shared morning tea with their children, participants' pushed in on the children to get their favourite food. One facilitator reminded the parents to "let kids go first". This was met with "I want these biscuits. She [child] always gets these ones."

- Participants' reactions when they were asked by the parent facilitator to stop talking over each other – sometimes they slide down in their chair, talk under their breath to the participant next to them…At one point the facilitator had to refer back to the group agreement and renegotiate what they had all agreed at the beginning of the course.

- A participant was giggling excessively and burping loudly. The facilitators ignored the behaviour until it started to disrupt others and distract attention away from the session. When she was asked to stop doing this by the facilitators she responded "I can't". One facilitator then said "well [name] I want you to leave the room and wait until you can control yourself because you are disrupting what I am trying to do". The parent participant walked out and slammed the door. After a break, she was supported to come back into the group by the facilitators. (Researcher reflective journal July, 2013)

Research shows that parents experiencing poverty are sometimes suspicious of professionals, and service approaches, that resemble inequality and practitioner dominance (Simpson, Lumsden & McDowall Clark, 2015). Regardless of the fact the BAP course was being facilitated by parent facilitators (other local parents), the intervention's association with local services and the environment they were delivered in, may still have resembled previous experiences of parents where they had perceived inequality and practitioner dominance. Participants in this study might therefore have been viewing themselves as being recipients of the same system again. The sometimes un-adult like responses could be paralleled with Freire's assertion of oppressed people themselves becoming sub-oppressors in the initial stages of liberation (2005). That is, their behaviours can be as controlling as the oppressive behaviours they have seen exhibited by the possessing class. However, in the context of the peer-led intervention, this perspective needs to be balanced by the reality that the participants were prepared to receive feedback from the facilitators and remained engaged with the intervention.

4.9.3.3 Caring for each other

The researcher observed the growth of genuine care and concern between participants over the period of the BAP course. Participants worked hard to listen to each other, responded with warmth and empathy to what was shared by others, and regularly affirmed each other. This was regularly illustrated when participants and the facilitators responded to participants shared difficulties they were encountering in their parenting or daily lives. In

response to one participant's description of a particularly difficult week she had experienced, another participant said:

> You've held it together well – you're doin' an amazing job considerin'… (Parent 2).

The parent facilitator then offered a response that appeared to reinforce parents' experiences and to normalise them:

> When I went through this course I found….. you sound like me. We both found the same things" (Facilitator 1)

In another instance, participants were invited by the parent facilitators to reflect on the feelings they experienced when they were punished or misunderstood as a child, one participant began to quietly cry. Without being invited by facilitators she began talking about her recollection of her mother's alcohol abuse and her own violent reaction towards her mother;

Parent five:

> … all that happened – it was only a broken chair – but she should have never left us all alone all the time, to go out fucking drinkin'… she was only lookin' out for my safety really ….. How could I have done that to my mum? I'm very ashamed. I must have put her through hell. Then something hit me. I got out of bed one day and something changed.

Parent facilitator:

> So you grew up that day then!

Parent five:

> Well I disappeared for a whole weekend. Police caught me – paddy wagon – sent me to live with me dad as a punishment. I cried and cried. I rang mum every day. Dad ditched me and left me in the middle of no-where. I learnt my lesson. In the paddy wagon, everyone in the street was out there watchin'. I was so embarrassed.

Following this, other parent participants contributed to what they had heard; Parent eight:

> Geez, [participant name] that's one of them things that might make you the great mum you're really trying to be now.

Parent six:

> Not just mum…. She's great for all people who are doing it tough round here. She did change that day – frickin' superwoman if you ask me!

Data gathered through the participatory observation of a BAP course provided the researcher with first-hand knowledge and understanding of the evolution of relationships between parent facilitators and parent participants of the intervention. Relationships between all involved appeared to be characterised by a level of gentleness and care that was emblematic of a deep understanding of each other's lived experience.

The categories that emerged from Group Three data, discussed above, contributed to an overarching theme of ***learning through empathic and authentic relationships***. Again, this theme is linked to the notion of learning and personal transformation. There was a discernible shift from Group One where participants reported on their learning about parenting, and their perceptions of themselves as parents, to the deeper observation, evident in the data from groups two and three, of personal learning occurring with and through other parents (fellow participants' and parent facilitators).

Given the common threads that emerged through the categories and themes in Groups One, Two and Three, it is important to reiterate that there was no duplication of individual participants in any of the groups participating in this study.

4.9.4 Group Four – Interviews with parent facilitators

Data was collected from BAP course parent facilitators through a semi-formal interview conducted with each of the five facilitators in this group. At the time the interviews were conducted, each Group Four participant had co-facilitated at least two BAP courses.

The categories that emerged through analysis of data from Group Four indicate that participants were aware of the significance of their own personal transformations through their involvement with the intervention. The categories were:

- Increased confidence and changing perspectives,
- Skill development and evolving roles, and,
- Thinking and reflecting benefits relationships

An exploration and description of these categories follows.

Increased confidence and changing perspectives

Participants were able to identify examples of changes in both their personal confidence and their self-perceptions. Such personal changes have the potential to contribute to a 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1981). Parent participants adopted an increasingly reflective stance, leading them to new perspectives and understanding about their children, their families, their parenting and themselves. Participants' reported on their individual perspective transformations and articulated new possibilities and opportunities that evolved from their new perspectives. As a result of their increased confidence and individual changes, what might have previously seemed impossible, for some participants, became possible:

> But a couple of years ago I decided - something changed when I started the BAP course. It was a year of trying new things and pushing my own personal boundaries. …And look where it has got me!... Confidence! I've gained a lot of confidence in a lot of areas. Trusting myself a bit more too. Being open to learning. (Annabelle)

> I grew and I controlled the situation better and I know I have the right to control it which also put me in a better position with my husband. … I said to him 'I sought my father out in you'. A lot of people do that stuff. It's what I know, it's what I relate to. I also said, 'I had to get away from my father when I was 16-17. Is this message getting clear to you? Continue on the path of controlling and I'll tell you now that a mother is meant to protect her children and I will not allow you to bully or parent in a way that you felt hurt by your own father. I will not stand by and watch that.' And I said, 'if that means I've got to leave to protect my children, I will'. Because he had quite a traumatic childhood as well. (Karen)

These data illustrates the participants' new understanding and perspectives on existing situations. Karen realised she had the capacity to act on a complex relational issue through clear and confident decisions. She appeared resolute in what needed to occur emanating from a new perspective and a confidence and clarity she may not have previously enjoyed.

Skill development and evolving roles

Parent facilitators noticed the evolution of their learning and how this contributed to their own skill development. They further reported the impact this had on their capacity to assume roles they may have perceived to be beyond their ability. Participants' acknowledged the potential for their own learning to influence others around them. They

talked about a process of personal growth that enabled trajectories of learning, resulting in new roles and possible employment opportunities:

> But I mean she [daughter] is, she is learning from it, she is, I think. But not only from her learning, I think cos I'm learning… I mean like I'm learning to do different things and do things in different ways and you know like I mean yeah you just feel as I said there's a lot of light bulb moments. (Michelle)

> Realising I can do more helped me stop worrying about the little things – realize I'm not needed by my children all the time. It helped me become a staff member at the CFC. I'm now a worker at the CFC! (Rachel)

> Well, one thing led to another thing and after being out of work and stuck at home by myself – a single mum, autistic kid, can't go anywhere… now look at me. BAP facilitator, workin' in the CFC, on the committee and it goes on. I've just got the job cleaning the centre and they call me to do the centre assistant work sometimes. (Sally)

> The parents say 'hey this woman who's done the course [facilitator] is just a mum at home and now she's done the facilitator training'. I don't even think being paid is the incentive. I look past that. That I can do it is what matters most. That I look at myself and see I'm a learner in life, a learner in something. (Karen)

Parent facilitators' experiences illuminated their awareness of the impact of their skill development and growth on other people. Their personal growth and change was subsequently acknowledged by others through new opportunities and invitations to perform new roles such as employment in a CFC, facilitator of a parenting course, and membership on a local committee.

Thinking and reflecting benefits relationships

The multiple layers of learning evident through the peer-led intervention appeared to gradually unfold through the participants' personal reflections. The BAP course is carefully structured in a way that enables participants to explore an array of parenting concepts through shared discussion and demonstrations with their peers; recall their experiences of being parented; think about their current parenting experience, and; view their parenting from their child's perspective.

This subtle formulaic process appeared to support participants to adopt a reflective stance. Parents in Group One and Group Two talked about 'thinking more' or 'wondering'. Having immersed themselves in the content of BAP as parent participants, again as trainee facilitators, then as parent facilitators, Group Four participants recalled experiences and anecdotes that gestured toward their increased reflection about themselves and their lives.

This appeared to lead to personal realisations and decisions about their parenting and their relationships:

> Life is tough and people can be nasty and critical and I think if you keep demonstrating this your children have to see and learn it. My parents didn't demonstrate this knowledge that I've got now cos they knew no better. … I get very resentful and very angry about things my parents did but since doing EPEC I've also come to the conclusion – ok, yes, it's alright to be angry with mum. She had a choice, she made a choice to live like that. She couldn't do no better at the time. So that's alright, that's just the way it is. (Karen)

> I mean to have this sort of thing it gives you the opportunity to stop and think that, you know, it doesn't have to be like that, that it can be totally different. …basically I didn't want them [children]to feel the way that I felt when I was growing up and there was no way that I was going to let them grow up like that. As I said my childhood wasn't good and um that was probably one of the first things that popped into my head was, 'Nope my daughter, my kids, aren't going to grow up like that. (Michelle)

The power of reflection as a vehicle to support personal change was emphasised by parent facilitators who participated in this group. Although interviewed separately, they spoke, as if in chorus, about their awareness of evolving and personal transformations as they progressed through the different levels of the EPEC program. Furthermore, their roles as parent facilitators of the BAP course provided a realistic model for BAP participants of what could be possible for themselves should they pursue the same learning pathway.

Overall, the parent facilitators spoke about personal change in more depth and with greater authority than the participants in Groups One to Group Three. This indicates a definite change in perspective and confidence that can occur as participants' progress through the layers of learning in the intervention to become facilitators within it. This change was linked by some participants to their increased practice of reflection and awareness of themselves as learners:

> The facilitator is a learner – a parent learner. We're all still learning from the participants as well in a sense. I want all the parents to just relax and say "well she is just one of us" at the end of the day… In the group I just finished, I think they expected older teachers, who did not have kids of their own, who would come in and just teach them stuff… it makes a massive difference that they are hearing stuff about parenting from another mother. (Rachel)

The dynamic of modelling for others, as opposed to lecturing or teaching, appeared to resonate with both BAP participants and parent facilitators. As Rachel indicated, parent facilitators remained aware of their role as co-learners alongside the parent participants of the course they were facilitating. Rachel could not only speak from the perspective of a facilitator but also from the perspective of a parent participant given her progression through the intervention. All of the parent facilitators demonstrated a relaxed approach to modelling behaviours in small group settings, discussion, and practice. This appeared to support the initial engagement of participants:

> You're teaching them but you're not teaching….you're not telling them, you know, like if you've got a teacher that's out the front of the classroom and they're saying, 'you need to do, or you have to do this this and this,' (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

Rachel's observation that the facilitation style adopted by parent facilitators was less formal and less didactic might suggest an approach that was less confronting for parents who may not have felt relaxed in a service setting. This data also gestures towards a less formal style of learning for BAP course participants.

Parent facilitators also talked about the benefits of revisiting the BAP course content through facilitating and subsequently practicing and refining their own parenting skills:

> The good part about it for me was as a parent, when you become a facilitator you do it all a second time so then the message becomes stronger and stronger and you hear different messages, you get lots of little branch messages as you do it more and more time to strengthen what it is, what the importance is. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

This data shows that Karen a parent facilitator, was able to identify her deepening understanding of key messages that arose from her continued immersion in the content through her facilitation role.

Categories that emerged from analysis of data from Group Four indicated that participants were aware of the significance of their own personal transformations through their involvement with the intervention. The previously discussed themes from groups' one, two and three focused on caring social relationships, learning, change and reflection. They are linked together by the theme that emanated from Group Four data - ***Reflective 'co-learner' and 'co-worker'.***

4.9.5 Group Five – Interviews with EPEC supervisors

Two professionals who were engaged by the intervention as EPEC supervisors participated in Group Five of this study through semi-formal one to one interviews. The data gathered in both interviews largely focused on the supervisors' perceptions of parents' experiences in the peer-led intervention and the attributes of a service system that support ongoing learning for parents and professionals. The EPEC supervisors' comments pointed to the concept of reciprocation in relationships between professionals and parents in which reflection and learning could become a shared experience and practice. This mirrors the presence of reflective behaviours and modelling identified in the learning relationship between BAP participants and the parent facilitators in the data from the previous four groups.

The most common codes evident in the transcripts from the interviews with the two professional workers were focused around learning, modelling, and engagement. Each of these were represented by more than one context or meaning as outlined in the following table.

Table 12 - Recurring codes in Group Five data

CODE	CONTEXTS AND MEANINGS
Learning	• Parents learn from each other • Sharing ideas and experiences • Professionals learn from observing parents • Successfully applying new skills helps reinforce learning • Parents encounter opportunities for change through reflection
Modelling	• Parents are influenced by the modelling of other parents • Reflective behaviours of facilitators are noticed by parents • The work between parent facilitators models respectful adult relationships and parent child interactions • Supervision of parent facilitators models facilitation strategies and reflective behaviours
Engagement	• Practitioners and parents engage in reflective behaviours together • Parents engaged with each other through modelling reflective behaviours • Parent facilitators engage more successfully with some parents because they relate better to them

- BAP participants engage other parents in practicing newly acquired parenting skills in CFC environment
- The common language of BAP helps parents engage with each other, and professionals to engage with parents

Thematic analysis of data from Group Five participants' resulted in the following prominent categories:

- Parents and workers learn from and with each other
- Parents are credible to other parents
- Service environments and worker behaviours can influence parent engagement

A discussion of these categories follows.

Parents and workers learn from and with each other

The two EPEC supervisors spoke about BAP participants and the parent facilitators as people they learnt from and with:

> I suppose I give to them [BAP participants] but they give to me. It's two way. We learn with each other and from each other. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

> In supervising parent facilitators, and really reflecting on things with them, I come to realise things about, um, yes, about myself. That is not always comfortable. But sharing that with them and helping them see I'm learning too, seems to do something. I think it says that we're not that different really – just different roles but learning the same things. It's like we're a team of learners – BAP participants, peer facilitators, and supervisors – we're all just learning! (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Both supervisors made complementary points in relation to all stakeholders learning from and with others. They motioned towards an implicit understanding of the positive effect of all stakeholders (professional workers, parent/facilitators and parent participants) learning from each other. Group Five participants (EPEC supervisors) talked openly about their shared learning with parents. Similar observations about learning with and from others were made by parent participants and parent facilitators as outlined earlier in this chapter

Parents are credible to other parents

The EPEC supervisors offered a service provider's perspective related to the value and credibility of parent facilitators in bridging the divide between the service and parent communities:

> …they're [parent facilitators] unreal how they can just hop into doing it [facilitating BAP], not always in a super polished way but, ah, they get the points across because they know the audience better than I ever could. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)
>
> Parents who might not want to visit 'a service' will come to BAP because it's run by other parents… when they get here they say 'oh, ok, I don't get treated like a number. I can come right in, get comfy, see other people like me, and know that the facilitators are just more people like me. I can do this.' (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)
>
> The [parent] facilitators of BAP know just what it is like being a parent in the community where EPEC is being offered and I can see the natural flow and understanding between them and the parents who enter the course. It's just natural. They put parents at ease and help them relax so much better than I ever could. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

The perceived benefit of an intervention being facilitated by 'someone like me' was reported throughout the data from groups one to four and further reinforced by the EPEC supervisors. The EPEC supervisors suggested that the parent facilitators, as the deliverers of the intervention, were able to influence parent participants' decisions to engage and continue through the intervention.

Service environments and worker behaviours can influence parent engagement

The data from Group Five also suggests that the physical environment of the CFC building might have played a role in engaging parents in the program. The 'relaxed' physical lay-out of the centre, combined with the relaxed approach of the parent facilitator, potentially helped parents relax as they tentatively re-engaged with services:

> The CFC helps, yes in a big way! The relaxed design helps them to really do just that – RELAX. … (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

However, in the quote below, Cecilia pointed out that the supportive environment relied on professional behaviours that supported the engagement of families who do not regularly access services. She suggested that behaviours that help parents relax are not something that came easily to all professionals:

> It takes a real genuineness and humility on the part of the worker to engage differently. It requires them to genuinely 'wonder'…Some workers who support the BAP facilitators, you can just see they love this way of working. It's like they've found a way of working that really suits what they want to do. It just looks so right. For others, it is a big challenge! Even a too big a leap. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Cecilia highlighted genuineness and humility as necessary qualities of the engaging worker. This reflect the findings of Davis and Day (2010) who have identified the same attributes as qualities of an effective worker.

The overarching theme arising from Group Five data was ***respectful engagement of parents requires authentic partnership.*** This theme helps define the reflective learning relationships and peer to peer modelling, identified through the data from the previous four groups, as a partnership that might support families to engage with services.

4.10 An overarching perspective of intersecting themes

The discussion in the previous sections of this chapter has provided an overview of the data that was collected from the five groups of study participants, the categories that emerged from the data analysis and overarching themes from the data in each group of participants in the study. Green et al. (2007) describe the process of identifying themes in qualitative research as providing an explanation or an interpretation of the issue being examined and then testing this explanation with both the data and the existing theory. Outcomes of this are evident in the following chapters where the themes are discussed drawing on the data and theoretical concepts. The five overarching themes outlined through this chapter are:

- Transformative change for parents supported by reflective learning, strengthened networks, and improved self-perception
- Learning and changing with and from others
- Learning through empathic and authentic relationships
- Reflective 'co-learner' and 'co-worker'
- Respectful engagement of parents requires authentic partnership

Viewing these five themes together, and considering the supporting data, and the accompanying literature that was discussed in Chapter Two and further expounded in the following discussion chapters justifies the identification of some common factors that thread across the themes. They are:

- Transformed reflective learning relationships
- Transformative change for parents

- Transformed relationships between parents and service providers

The overarching theme of ***transformative change*** will be analysed and discussed in detail as a dynamic that can result from the shared process of reflective learning between parents and professionals in the context of parent support services.

4.11 Summary

Multiple methods of data collection within a qualitative data analysis approach enabled the identification of complementary categories and themes that emerged from the data collected through this study. Reflection, learning, co-learning, parenting skill development, increased confidence, changing perspectives and personal transformation all emerged repeatedly through the parent participants' experiences of a peer-led parenting intervention.

Interviews with two EPEC supervisors helped further substantiate these resonating concepts. Furthermore, the EPEC supervisors' accounts served to embed the parent participants' experiences within a service context that was strongly focused on engaging with families living in communities that were characterised by significant disadvantage.

The methods planned for this study were implemented with only minimal variation from the anticipated design. The most significant diversion in study design was in the use of the Group Two questionnaires after it was discovered that BAP participants preferred not to complete questionnaires as readily as previously anticipated. Service providers involved in working with the peer-led intervention advised that this was due to issues associated with low levels of literacy issues. However, the lower number of completed questionnaires did not impact detrimentally on the outcomes of the study.

Analysis of the various forms of data exposed strong overarching themes pointing unequivocally to the significant role reflection and learning can play in supporting parents through personal and parenting transformations. Subsequent chapters explore a variety of participant experiences that led to personal transformations, and describe the effect these had for the participants, their families, and the local service systems. However, in order for parents to benefit from any parenting intervention, services must consider the variety of complex issues that both help and hinder relationships between services and families who have struggled to access services.

The following three chapters provide a detailed examination of the various intersecting themes outlined in this chapter. The chapters will illustrate how transformation experienced by individual parents, supported by professionals, can have a cumulative effect across a local service context resulting in the co-authorship of new ways of working with and for families who experience difficulty accessing services.

Chapter Five provides evidence of the unique benefits for parents when they are enabled to perform meaningful roles, in the provision of parenting interventions, in partnership with professionals and other parents. It examines the steps involved in supporting parents to move beyond being recipients of parenting services to actively contributing as co-workers and co-learners within, the service system. The process illuminated in Chapter Five involves parents experiencing personal multi layered transformations in their perceptions of themselves as parents, learners, and contributors to the delivery of experiences that benefit other parents and the service setting. This includes the potentially transformative experiences arising from reciprocally beneficial co-learning relationships that evolved between professional workers and parents.

Chapter Five: Transformation in parenting and for parents

"Transformed people transform people" (Rohr, 2009, p. 88)

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of the data presented in Chapter Four enabled the identification of salient themes together with common factors that thread across the themes. These factors are, 'transformed reflective learning relationships'; 'transformative change for parents'; and, 'transformed relationships between parents and service providers'. These are all centrally connected to the notion of change.

The data gathered and analysed in this research illustrates how participants' regular use of reflection, and their capacity for this purposeful action, offer new learnings for parent participants. The participants sometimes encountered personal and confronting issues or realisations in the process of reflecting on their own parenting experiences through their participation in the peer-led parenting intervention. For many, the perspectives that were gained through their participation in the process led to transformative experiences. Transformations occurred not only in participants approaches to parenting but also in their capacity to influence others, and participate as valued actors within the service system and, in so doing, contribute to transformations for other parents like themselves. This analysis has enabled the development of a proposition that re-positions parents as 'partners in practice' alongside professionals that is developed later in the thesis.

In this chapter, transformation is explored as a dynamic that occurred for participants in their parenting and how it was evidenced by them. Data discussed in this chapter highlights how personal transformations experienced by individual parent participants were enabled and supported by their interactions with other parents in a peer-led parenting intervention. This was evident in parents witnessing changes that occurred for their peers as they assumed roles as facilitators of the intervention. The process of parents moving from being recipients of services to becoming reflective 'partners in practice' (Daley et al., 2008) alongside professionals appeared to contribute strongly to examples of personal transformations illustrated through the data in this chapter.

Using both empirical data and theoretical concepts that help illuminate the changes that occurred for participants, the discussion in this chapter interprets the study's themes of

reflective learning, learning with and alongside other parents, and transformative change. A central concern of this investigation is understanding the conditions that were enabling for participants changed approaches to parenting. These included participants regularly reporting their own perceptions of personal changes including; an increased sense of calm; being, connected to others, and; belonging to a practice community characterised by equality and a shared culture of reflection and learning. It is these conditions that appear to support the parent to adopt a critically reflective approach in the practice and adaptation of new skills in other settings. The evidence relating to participants' renewed confidence, reflective behaviours, and their practice of newly acquired skills, contribute to building a practice model that not only helps sustain individual practices but also influences changed practices for others.

The overarching theme of transformation illuminated in this chapter will be explored as a dynamic that was identified through the study across a number of different layers. These were identified as transformation for parents; transferring new skills to other contexts; transformations in how parents can learn together and within services; a transformed and engaging community or parents; and, the cumulative effect of these in transforming traditional parent support service structures. The exploration of each of these areas will include a discussion of the factors that help sustain transformed practices and perspectives. The detailed discussion that follows in this chapter is contextualised within the context of parent-to-parent learning. This peer-to-peer learning appeared to contribute significantly to changes that occurred for participants in this study.

The chapter begins with a focus on parents as social learners and how such social learning interactions can have a calming influence for parents. The data discussed in this chapter also reinforces the presence of shared language and concepts, reinforced through the peer-led intervention but exercised by parents beyond the parenting intervention. These included the concept of 'good enough parent' (Winnicott, 1953), and reflective behaviours (Fonagy & Target, 1997; Slade, 2007). The discussion in this chapter continues by illuminating the potential transformative effect for parents arising out of ongoing shared learning alongside other parents and professionals. The concept of transformation is examined as a concept evident in participants parenting behaviours and how newly acquired skills and concepts can be replicated in other contexts. Analysis of data in this study is also used in this chapter to explore the notion of sustaining newly acquired skills,

concepts and behaviours and how this can contribute to the transformation of individual parent's perspectives. The influential role of shared reflection between parents and professionals as a mechanism to support shared learning in a parent support context is also discussed in this chapter. Based on the strength of these findings, the chapter concludes with an explanation of how the reflective social learning behaviours identified between participants in this study might contribute to the possibility of transformed approaches to parenting education.

5.2 Parents as social learners: Recognising and implementing change

Analysis of the data from this study identified the significance of social learning evident in the ongoing interactions between parents and also in their encounters with professionals. Ongoing interactions between participants provided opportunities for reinforcing key skills and concepts they had acquired through their participation in a peer-led parenting intervention. Continued use of shared concepts and skills also led to the emergence of an informal community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) further strengthening the links between parents and practitioners involved in these exchanges.

A key assertion of 'social learning theory' is that humans are influenced in their learning by a number of interacting personal, behavioural, and environmental factors (Bandura & Davidson, 2003, 'Personal behaviour environment' section). Social learning theory has emerged as an influential perspective on what helps learners develop, adapt and change (Bandura, 1969; 1982; 1989; 2000). Learners are supported to succeed in adopting new behaviours through social encounters, observation of others, a discovery of what one wants to change or achieve, and incentives that might encourage the new behaviours. In the frame of social learning theory, habitual behaviours are socially constructed, deeply embedded and difficult to change because they function below the level of consciousness (Lea, Cadman & Philo, 2015).

Considering the notion of helping parents to learn and acquire new skills, the perspective of social learning theory would suggest parents' first need to be aware of what they wanted to change in their parenting prior to being able to successfully implement change. Participants in this study arrived at new ways of interpreting their experiences. A common consideration for participants arising from their participation in the peer-led parenting intervention, was the influence of their own parents' lifestyles and choices. Some

participants' described how the experience of the intervention helped them reflect on and make sense of their own childhood experiences:

> I think it's um been good to work through some of those things and to understand … just working through them in my own head and trying to make sense of perhaps how my parents were, and why they did the things that they did. How they managed it the way they did and what not. (Lilly, BAP Participant)

> Well with me mum, we could get away with murder but with me dad, it was different. You get on the wrong side of him and you never knew what would come at ya. I remember belting after belting and I remember hoping it could stop – I hated him. So I told them [other parents], me boy, he gets a smack sometimes but he will never get belted like I did. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

> I get very resentful and very angry about things my parents did but since doing EPEC I've also come to the conclusion – ok, yes, it's alright to be angry with mum. She had a choice, she made a choice to live like that. She couldn't do no better at the time. So that's alright, that's just the way it is. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

These participants were able to identify what they wanted to change in their own parenting or how they hoped to parent differently from the parenting behaviours they had experienced as children. Change in parenting practices, or entrenched behaviours, requires an awareness of what needs to change, and knowledge of possible alternatives. Likewise, the application of new skills and concepts requires practice and continued practice is supported by the anticipated rewarding outcomes (Bandura, 1969).

Reflecting Bandura's conceptualisation of social learning participants in this study described the reactions they experienced from others when they exercised new skills and their subsequent incentive to continue practicing the same behaviours. Michelle described the incentive she experienced to keep new learning alive from the success she experienced in using parenting concepts she has acquired through participating in the peer-led intervention:

> …the whole, "I feel…" thing, I mean, that lives in my house now. I'd say [to children], "Look youse are really starting to pee me off, I'm jack of leaving your clothes and everything, it takes two minutes rah rah rah." You know, you get no response. But as soon as I say to my kids, "***I feel*** really sad because I've asked you to pick them up and they're still sitting there", and they'll look at me and you know they hate the fact that I feel sad …they don't like me sad at all, and they're straight down and picking them up. So yeah it's something I don't even think about now. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

When individuals succeed through their own effort, others who witness the process can be motivated by the belief that they too have what it takes to do the same (Bandura & Davidson, 2003). It is therefore possible that in observing Michelle successfully utilise these skills her partner may be motivated to practice the same techniques. It is argued that ongoing exchange of ideas and experiences between parents is beneficial to sustaining new practices (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003). The notion of parents learning through sharing of experiences of successes and challenges is strongly reflected in this study. The context for social learning was a parenting intervention led by peer facilitators who were able to introduce concepts and ideas to their peers, reinforced by their own experiences of successfully applying them in their own parenting. Through their modelling parent facilitators were active vehicles for other parents learning. This resonates with what Bandura (1969) called 'identificatory processes' (p. 217) and occurred through parent participants identifying a level of similarity between their own situation and those of the parent facilitators. Parent participants in the parenting intervention could then apply the same knowledge or skills and achieve similar responses. In effect, the parent facilitators, as parents themselves, could trigger 'identificatory behaviours' (Bandura, 1969) for parent participants in which they could encounter a new skill or behaviour from parent facilitators, explore the concept further with their peers and later apply the new behaviours in their parenting. Following a roleplay by parent facilitators that focused on different approaches to discipline of a child, a parent participant offered the following observation to the facilitators:

> When you did that role play, then I understood it, what ya do – with kids when they're muckin' up. It's like just makin' it all clear. This is this and that is that and this happens when you do that. (Group 2 participant)

In her brief description of how the role-play helped her, this participant highlighted the significance of identificatory processes in social-learning theory (Bandura, 1969). She appeared to make sense of the parent facilitators' demonstration by applying it to her own circumstance and drawing her own new meaning from it.

Another model of social learning, communities of practice, exemplifies learning as an experience of meaning making that is socially constituted (Farnsworth, Kleanthous & Wenger-Trayner, 2016). The excerpt above reflects this. The participant was able to overlay

the messages conveyed through the role-play to her own parenting, and then potentially replicating the new learning through the application of it in her own parenting practice.

The way parenting concepts and ideas were introduced and shared through the peer-led intervention reflected a model of social learning. Social learning theory (Bandura 1969) draws attention to the influence of humans learning through interactions with each other. Parents can adopt both problem social behaviours and protective behaviours from observational learning and conditioning (Thyer & Myers, 1998) and these can be passed from generation to generation (Fraiberg et al., 1975; Singh Narang & Contreras, 2004; Neppl et al., 2009).

Participants in this study appeared to understand the potential for new behaviours and concepts to be transmitted between individuals. Some participants were also able to recount experiences of their own changed response to situations in applying their new knowledge of how people learn from each other. Michelle, a parent facilitator offered such an example in relation to her teenage daughter's escalating behaviour, where Michelle was able to spontaneously implement an impromptu strategy to resolve the issue:

> …and I'm thinking, 'Oh crikey,' blood pressure went up and I'm thinking, 'I just can't deal with it now!' And then there was a parcel that I actually got out of the post box and I said to her [daughter], 'See this parcel?' and she looked at me and she went, 'Yeah.' I said, 'This is a talking parcel, when I have it in my hands I can talk and you need to listen to everything I say,' and she looked and, 'Yep,' and I said, 'But then when you have it, I have to listen to everything that you say and I can't butt in.' And so we sat down at the table and she looked at me like I was an idiot to start off with and she had the parcel to start off with and she wanted to do netball and rah-di-rah-rah and she gave me the parcel and I explained to her you know, 'Look netball's a team sport, it's not something you can do like once or twice and then you're sick of it and you don't just let yourself down, you let everyone down.' … every time she wanted to talk I'd hold this parcel up you know and um yeah at the end of the conversation, no heated conversation. It was like talking to this little adult and I was just totally blown away. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

The concept of a 'talking parcel' described and used by Michelle, was not introduced or modelled in the parenting intervention. Her innovation in an encounter with her daughter was developed and applied in the heat of the moment and appeared to be enabled by Michelle's parenting confidence. She went on to recount her observation of her husband successfully using the same concept with their daughter on another occasion. The fact that her husband emulated the parenting behaviour he observed is not unusual. It is understood

that observing others perform certain tasks can enable the observer to make assessments about their own ability to do the same (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). Through modelling for and with each other, the parent participants in this study were able to observe and experience the result of newly discovered parenting skills. The parent learner's motivation to act on the new learning is directly linked to an individual's belief they can implement the action and achieve the desired outcome (Bandura & Davidson, 2003). The modelled example of 'someone like me' (Winter, 2013) may have provided the motivation for individuals to exercise newly learnt ideas and skills in other places and contexts.

Humans tend to gravitate towards others who are like themselves (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). However, research shows that rich learning experiences emanate from the interactions between people of diverse experiences and backgrounds (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Geens and Vandenbroeck (2012) call for professionals to give greater attention to the relational aspect of social support, and the potential for positive interactions between diverse groups of people as a valuable source of parent support. In this study, a diverse group of parents were drawn together to identify as partners in a shared social learning experience through common 'identity resources' (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Identity resources are present when people's interactions bring together internal and external resources of common understanding that are related to their collective and individual identities. They build a sense of 'belonging' and encourage participation and help reframe individuals' views enabling them to act in new ways (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). This study illustrates how such a shared social learning experience between groups of people from diverse backgrounds and abilities can occur and be valued:

> Everybody's come from like totally different situations and they're all living in different- like - their households are all different, you know. None of us were the same! (Angela, BAP Participant)

Angela pointed to the obvious diversity amongst members of her informal learning community. Despite the diversity of the group of people Angela referred to above, they were still bound together through the shared use of such resources. The culture of learning between participants appeared to provide a vehicle for parents to examine those things that influence them in their own parenting. This concept is mirrored in the work of McConnell, Breitkreuz and Savage (2011) who highlight the potential for social support networks to

provide informal learning opportunities for parents through which they can support and affirm each other.

The concept of social learning has emerged as significant in this study and was strengthened by the fact that participants initially acquired new parenting skills and concepts from other parents through 'identificatory behaviours' (Bandura, 1969). The fact that the conveyors of the learning were other parents appeared to help enable participants to overlay these concepts on their own parenting experiences and have the confidence to implement and practice them. The data showed that over time, the ongoing shared learning between parent participants contributed to a sense of calm for many participants.

5.3 The calming influence of learning with others like oneself

Several participants in this study described personal situations that resulted in them feeling stressed and isolated in their parenting. Examples of participant isolation, evident in the data from this study are discussed in Chapter Six and are strongly contrasted with participants' descriptions of feeling calmer and more confident following participation in the parenting intervention. As a participant in this study, Giulia's initial description of her parenting and social situation were characterised by long pauses and descriptions of inadequate family and social support:

> I miss my mother being here and looking after the kids cos my mother always helped me while I was pregnant through hard times ... Because I had bit of a depression after I had [second child's name] so she helped um because he had sleepless nights… (Giulia, BAP Participant)

Sometime after the intervention the same participant described her increased confidence and was able to identify new networks and activities that kept her connected to others:

> It's giving people like myself my confidence back and my self-esteem where I thought never in my life that I would go through this sort of course. It's just - it - honestly, it opened me up. I think if this course wasn't here I would be… sorry [crying]… I don't know where I would be. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

Giulia's experience of moving from stress and isolation, to increased confidence, was also reflected in descriptions provided by other participants. The experience of learning alongside others in similar situations, and understanding that they were not alone through their ongoing social interactions resulted in a normalising effect for some participants:

> Another thing about the course was it was good because you actually heard and saw that you weren't on your own. You know there's other mothers that were stressed about same sort of things that you were...It makes you think that you're normal and that other mums do get stressed the same as what I do … they're tired and you know got other worries as well and sometimes that's just all it is. (Angela, BAP participant)

Angela hinted at the reassuring effect of discovering that she was not the only parent who experienced stress in parenting.

Other participants in this study also recounted similar experiences in meeting others like themselves in the parenting intervention:

> I met this lady at the course and she was just saying the same thing. Had a child to someone else, and with someone that's not their child's father, and that made me feel good. Well I told her. I said, 'Look, at least I don't feel like I'm the not only one'…. Just to get advice about how they do things different. (Dianna, BAP participant)

> It really brought out how I never thought like other parents would go through the same or do like what I did. Yes and then it did, it brought me back my memory of like 'oh yeah I can relate to that' or 'oh I can relate to that one too,'… (Giulia, BAP participant)

> But to hear other mums say 'Ah yes I was just so angry with the kids and I really shouted at them and then I felt really bad.' And I thought, 'Oh, wow, it's not just me,' you know, 'that shouts and then has the guilt afterwards'. (Amanda, BAP Participant)

> Ah it was good, they give me like other ideas and the girl that run the course, [facilitator name], she had virtually the same problems with the schools as I was having and that felt, it made me feel good. Her child was getting bullied at school and mine, [child's name] was getting bullied at school. Ah it made me feel good, that I'm not the only one. Ah pretty good, cos she's around my age group so it made me feel nice and relaxed. (Angela, BAP participant)

> Oh just seeing you know that I'm not the only one that has those, that's been facing the issues that we go through, all the little things, I'm not the only one who has the child that doesn't want to go to bed and things like that. (Lilly, BAP Participant)

These data indicate that in hearing similar experiences from other parents, participants' felt they were able to relate to each other, feel at ease, and increase their parenting confidence. Participants consistently reported their new awareness of themselves as being 'not alone' in contrast to the common perception of stress and isolation prior to entering the peer-led intervention. Respler-Herman et al., (2011), conclude that there is a strong correlation between a parent's perception of increased support networks and stress reduction. It is also

known that social support can provide a buffer for people who are experiencing stress (Weiss, 2002).

Given participants in this study were able to relate to each other in the context of a parenting intervention, provided opportunities for them to repeatedly bring into play the concepts and language they acquired through the shared experience of the intervention. One example of a common concept employed by participants in their parenting was the notion of being calm. Participants' descriptions of their own transformations from feeling stressed to being calm, reflected relief of pressure in their parenting role as the following excerpts convey:

> I was always like more stressed and now I seemed to have calmed down. I have calmed down a lot with the kids… This journey of me, a parent, being stressed about something, to getting to being quite calm about it." (Angela, BAP Participant
>
> I can calm myself down now and talk to her appropriately, so that will then follow on in the way she relates to her sister and her brother. (Neci, BAP Participant)

Significantly, the word 'calm' and the phrases 'I am calmer now', 'I'm more calm', 'I'm calm' are the most frequently repeated by participants in this study. Participants were also able to articulate the influence on children of a parent modelling calmness:

> A calm and confident parent has the ability to teach those messages [take care of yourself and make sure you are relaxed] better than a flustered overwhelmed manic parent. Children learn from modelling, from constant reminders of the messages to make it stick. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)
>
> I feel like I have direction now, and if something does come up, like I know how to handle it, and things stay calm… I like to be calm, with the kids, I think if you're calm with them it makes them calm, you know, so you don't have to scream and yell and rant and rave and carry on to get them to do what you want them to do. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

Participants' ongoing shared reflection and learning that occurred through the common gathering place of the Child and Family Centres, appeared to result in what Jokandan (2015) refers to as 'companionship calmness' and 'calmness of this moment'. Jokandan's recent essay explored calmness as a concept, from the writings of Rumi, a 12th Century Islamic scholar. The personal accounts of participants in this study also reflected the calming influence of companionship, and the moment of being together providing the vehicle for parents to experience being influenced by the calmness of others.

The repeated reference to calmness across the data in this study appeared to correlate with participants' regular use of the phrase 'good enough' to describe perceptions of their own parenting:

> …being a 'good enough' parent – I spent so long trying to be the perfect parent. Now I can say "it's ok, I am good enough". (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

In reference to parenting, the phrase 'good enough' was used no less than 37 times by participants across the study. It is known that the use of such artefacts enables newcomers to move towards full participation in a social learning community through what Lave and Wenger (1991) referred to as legitimate peripheral participation. Given its regular use by participants both within the intervention and after its completion, the phrase 'good enough parent' emerged as another shared artefact that helped enable such exchanges between parents and also in their encounters with professionals.

5.4 The "good enough parent"

The previously discussed notion of 'good enough' parent (Winnicott, 1953) has been used widely across parenting interventions and constitutes part of the common language shared through some parenting interventions. Whilst the depth of Winnicott's original concept of 'good enough' parent is not necessarily conveyed through such interventions, the implication of being 'good enough' as a parent resonated strongly with the participants in this study. The following excerpts from parent participants illustrate their ability to view themselves objectively as parents, doing the best job possible, with the knowledge and resource that they had:

> Well I get through the day and my six year old says to me, 'you didn't yell at us today…' there's no yelling today, and it's really good. I do like it when our house can get to a day's end and there has been no yelling, and that's the thing I see. (Neci, BAP Participant)

> Good parenting looks like a parent who is calm, listens, learns and tries to understand their children, and where there is fun for children. (Group 2 BAP Participant)

> I don't know why but everyone who appears to have done EPEC, the majority have had lots of issues when they were growin' up. They don't appear to have had warm, happy childhoods, they seem to have had a lot of trauma. Those that tell you that they're living the happiest lives, they never fight with their partners, their children are little angels – well I think they're full of shit. They have to learn this message of they're 'good enough'. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

The peer-led intervention provided participants with an ability to develop and articulate alternative constructions about what constitutes good parenting. Karen's comments above alluded to the pressure parents face in living up to the idealised corporate messages like that of the "proper new mother" (Nichols et al., 2009, p. 67) or as Tucci et al., (2005) put it, "…get parenting right" (p.10). However, the experience of the peer-led intervention helped parents garner new confidence that could buffer against such external pressures as illustrated by the following:

> But a couple of years ago I decided - something changed when I started the BAP course. It was a year of trying new things and pushing my own personal boundaries. And look where it has got me! ... Confidence! I've gained a lot of confidence in a lot of areas. Trusting myself a bit more too. Being open to learning. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)
>
> It's ok to be me and I'm the best me I can be. (Karen, Parent Facilitator).

The realisation that one does not have to strive for parenting perfection appeared to strike a resonant chord for participants who appeared tired of feeling not 'good enough'.

Whilst the intervention only provided participants with a cursory glimpse at the theoretical definition pertaining to mother and child's adaptation to each other, the perception of being 'good enough' as a parent, as opposed to being the *perfect parent* or *failing parent* helped parents in providing them with some level of reassurance. This study provides evidence of how this change for participants can mark a shift from in perspective on 'how am I perceived by others as a parent?' to, 'how do I feel about myself as a parent? How am I going really?'. The following data provides evidence of the transformation in participants' perspectives about themselves as parents, and their ability to appraise their own parenting based on the knowledge they had about themselves:

> You know the whole not being perfect and being 'good enough' is ok for me… But I think I've learnt to take compliments and um, you know, understand that I'm doing a good job. I am doing a good job, and I'm confident that I'm doing a good job. And I have beautiful children [laughs]. So you know, what else do you need? (Aileen, BAP Participant)
>
> Now I try not to be perfect, cos there's no one that's that perfect parent…. I just can't, there's no such thing! (Neci, BAP participant)

Through their experiences in the peer-led intervention, participants are in some way elevated to a broader view whereby they can observe and articulate their personal shift from 'overwhelmed' in their parenting through to being 'good enough'. Transcripts of

participant interviews were interspersed with their perceptions of the idealised 'perfect parent' or 'perfect family', often portrayed in contemporary advertising (Lavikka, 2012):

> I look at other mothers and, yes, I'm not in their home with them but I see how they, you know, seem to direct their children without any effort (Angela, BAP Participant).
>
> I still compare myself to other parents and, 'Oh such and such wouldn't do this with their child,' so yes I am guilty there… (Lilly, BAP Participant)

The common parent to parent comparison described by Angela and Lilly could nurture unrealistic personal expectations and even a sense of failure for some parents. However, some participants were able to offer their own analysis of the characteristics of a 'good enough' parent:

> Do you know the person I'm most judgmental of is myself! So, in a way it [the peer-led intervention] made me aware of things which has lightened the load…I had a 'perfect parent' expectation on myself and that just wasn't working – Now I'm calmer and at ease with being 'good enough' (Neci, BAP Participant)
>
> I realize how draining it was trying to live up to being perfect. It [being good enough] makes everything so much easier and more positive. (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)
>
> I think I'm good enough. I'm happy with how I try my hardest to meet every need I can for my children. (Participant 4, group 2)

The phrase 'good enough parent' continued to be used between parents and professional workers in the CFC setting beyond the peer-led intervention and became a part of the shared language in both social settings between parents and in their encounters with professionals in the CFC's. The experience for parent participants sharing something in common with workers, helped facilitate and build a sense of collegiality between them. The following data attests to the positive impact of shared language in building understanding between a parent and a professional:

> I went to the playgroup at the CFC and you know what, the teacher there didn't even do the BAP course with us and she knows about the 'good enough' parent as well. It was cool to hear even her say it. We talked the same. (Sally, BAP Participant)

The common language shared between parents and professionals indicates a sense of belonging together, of sharing common artefacts, and strengthens an argument for recognising these collective learning interactions as characteristic of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991).

The ongoing social learning practices evident between participants in this study supported participants' to learn from each other and be reassured about the positive influence of their new practices on themselves and in their parenting relationships. The data from this study also showed that continued learning interactions between participants could potentially lead parents to transformed and sustained perspectives and parenting practices.

5.5 Being both transformed and transformative for others

Reflection, learning, and transformative change were recurring themes across all groups of parents who participated in this study. The three core areas in which transformative change was evident for parent participants were, in their parenting, transformed behaviours in other contexts, and transforming perspectives through a reflective learning community of peers. These three areas will be discussed in the following subsections including an exploration of the factors that can help sustain such changes for parents beyond the life of the initial peer-led parenting intervention.

5.5.1 Transformations in being a parent

This section examines the concept of changed perspectives experienced by participants and evident in the data from this study, and how such changes helped participants recognise personal transformations in their own parenting behaviours.

As previously discussed, prior to participating in the peer-led parenting intervention, parents in this study frequently used the word 'stress' to describe perceptions of themselves in their parenting. Following the intervention, participants frequently described the change they experienced in their own approaches to parenting their children:

> I used to hit my child – and yelling, but I don't do that anymore. Now I just sit down and explain that, cos he has, cos of his disability. I explain things really slower and he understands… I've learnt not to be so stressed and [to be] more relaxed and calm. I explain things more to him instead of the yelling. He listens to me and when I ask him to do something, he's doing it. I'm at his level. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

> …when [child's name] has his tantrums, not to shout at him, go down his level, or if he's screaming or something's not right, I can go back and look at it and thinking, 'Hang on I shouldn't be shouting at him, I should talk to his level'. And that's giving me more confidence as well. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

In addition to the various reports of personal change and success in parenting, participants in this study recognised some spontaneous and unexpected outcomes from their changed

behaviours, in their relationships with other adults, and the benefits these had for their children:

> …But I mean she [daughter] is, she is learning from it, she is, I think too. But not only from her learning. I think cos I'm learning. …you know that when they [children] have kids that's something that's going to be stuck in their mind and hopefully they're going to carry that on? (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

> You forget how much they [children] sit back and take in and how much they watch and learn from us. So the more I can communicate with [partner's name] and um you know, in a respectful way, the better it is for her [child] of course. (Lilly, BAP Participant)

These data excerpts indicate the participants' awareness of the efficacious result of their new behaviours and skills on their children. It has been argued that a fundamental aim of effective parenting support is to enable parents to develop parenting efficacy (Miller & Sambell, 2003). Self-efficacy has been defined as "what I believe I can do with my skills under certain conditions" (Maddux, 2016, p. 4). Therefore, within the context of parenting, parents who are self-efficacious would need to have an ability to critically examine a given issue and recognise the need to employ particular skills or concepts to address the situation. Alternatively their discernment might lead to acquisition of further resources.

Whilst the concept of self-efficacy has been useful in terms of conceptualising changes parents might experience through parenting interventions, in much of the literature, it is talked about generally with little attempt to unpack its meaning. Furthermore, the concept is problematic when used in the context of enhancing the efficacy of parents experiencing adversity through parent education, as this can perpetuate a perspective of the powerful "possessing class" (Freire, 2005, p. 59) fixing the deficits of parents perceived to be not coping.

Nonetheless, a process that results in improved efficacy might help those affected experience new meaning for themselves. This can occur as the learner comes to understand new ideas and concepts that enable them to critically examine their own perspectives and practices, (Mezirow, 1978). The new behaviours and perspectives may be noticed by others as they are modelled and shared by the parent. One participant in this study was able to describe such an occasion in which her changed routine and behaviours, were noticed by her children:

> Then they [children] ask me at the end of the day 'how was your day?' Cos they know I am going to work. They see mum working at night with books getting ready for work the next day and they're proud of me. …It's from me role modelling that they [children] can do it. They've seen their mum now in stockings and skirts and they are excited for me. I'm not in my trackie dacks when I do this work [as facilitator]. They will say stuff like 'you look nice mum' and I know they are excited for me. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

Research shows that children's aspirations are significantly influenced by parental self-efficacy, aspirations and attainment (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Vittorio Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001). Therefore, Annabelle's children noticing and acknowledging her increased confidence, her new role as facilitator, and how these had influenced her, could possibly influence their own aspirations. Other participants' hinted towards themselves modelling new practices in their homes through their encounters with their children:

> …it was just so powerful and I don't know where it come from. I think it was just cos of everything that I'd learnt you know the whole listening thing and um yeah, and it just come to me and I was just blown away by this effect… I mean, like she had the respect to listen to me and not only that, by asking that of her, I had to give that of her as well. You know I had to give the same respect so yeah it was just brilliant, absolutely brilliant. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

> It's ok say like if something does go wrong if you shout or whatever if you say "I'm sorry" you know you can let them [children] see that you make mistakes but you can say look you know you can acknowledge it and say "well I didn't probably handle that very well" and just try and be an example to them, I suppose. (Lilly, BAP Participant)

Both of the participants' quoted above illuminate new realisations that arose from them reflecting on what they were seeing and experiencing with their children and how these led them to respond differently in certain parenting situations. These excerpts are also indicative of the parent participants experiencing success through the application of new skills and concepts.

Participants' descriptions of their own changed perspectives in parenting illustrated in this chapter, arose from parents increased awareness of their own changed behaviours and how this influenced both their children and their own perspectives on parenting. Participants in this study regularly reported experiences that indicated their awareness of their own distinctly reflective culture of practice that they were able to incorporate in their parenting. They stated that others noticed this culture of practice. Participants viewed these experiences as enriching communication, learning and a sense of teamwork with their children and partners as evidenced by the following:

> You forget how much they [children] sit back and take in and how much they watch and learn from us. So the more I can communicate with [partner's name] and um you know, in a respectful way, the better it is for her of course... he [partner] just has sometimes different ideas and doesn't believe in a lot of the same things I do so it makes it very hard but… he's getting better. If I talk to him about, it's just all about communication again even with him. We're just getting to know each other more and like we both get frustrated with each other because we don't talk enough and we can see that things are better if we do, so let each other know what's going on and don't just assume that we both know…. (Lilly, BAP Participant)

> They [children] seem to take more notice of what I'm saying to them and listen more themselves you know rather than, like if you're just screaming at them, you know, that's just noise… Seeing the effect it has on the kids and the way that my relationship with them, you know it's a lot better and a lot easier and not as, not that it's violent but you know it's not as banging heads against each other, it's more working together … He [partner] notices that I'm a lot calmer…. He said that he was worried about me there for a while… but he said that I have calmed down a lot with the kids. (Angela, BAP Participant)

> …even he [partner], he's starting to do it, so it really works. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

The excerpts above provide evidence for participants newly acquired skills and behaviours, applied in the parenting context, being noticed by other family members, and being transferred from one parent to the other through their continued modelling and practice. In addition to participants recognising that their new perspectives and skills influenced other family members, some participants also commented on the positive feedback they had received from their partners when applying new skills and techniques in their parenting:

> …my husband, he saw it too and he said 'how did you do that, to calm [child's name] down?' He noticed it and he can see me doing some things different. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

> There's been some pretty strong hints [from partner] suggesting that what I learnt, what I've done have been wonderful for my growth, umm, seeing me as a much happier person. He's seen the growth and has connected that to the EPEC on a number of occasions. He's open to this new way of learning and thinking. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

Both of Karen and Giulia's experiences of being complimented by others reinforce their own recognition of themselves as advocates for, and models of, new ways of approaching parenting within their own family contexts. Another participant was buoyed by the

opportunity to model skills that could be effectively applied to a situation involving both her child and partner:

> Her [daughter] and her dad are - they are so much alike and yeah I do that with them, if they're into it, I go, 'Ah hang on,' like this and whatever's on the table, could be a coffee cup it could be anything. I go, 'There you go', it just shuts them up, just gives them enough time to both have a go at listening. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

Michelle's experience of her partner and daughter employing communication strategies that she had introduced in the home reflects the generative learning model proposed by Lee, Lim and Grabowski (2008). The generative learning model proposes that ongoing learner involvement produces an increased capacity for individuals to recall the learned activity and regulate their behaviour in relation to the new knowledge. In the excerpt above, Michelle described how she came to generate new meaning within her own context and successfully adapt the use of her new skills. When this occurs for parents, their action may influence the behaviours and knowledge of others (children, partners, other adults).

Edwards (2010) described a similar phenomenon in a women's drop in centre, in which the relational support offered to those seeking support by professionals was reflected in an equivalent relational support being provided between those using the service. Edwards concluded that those receiving support were enabled to increase their capacity to seek help, as well as being able to offer help to others. Experiencing the impact and success of one's new behaviours would provide the incentive to keep such practices alive (Bandura & Davidson, 2003). However, in order to assess the impact of ones changed behaviours a parent must have the capacity to examine their practice.

A critical skill involved in assessing and refining ones practice is an ability to reflect and act on its outcome (Schon, 1983; Edwards & Thomas, 2010). As discussed in Chapter Two, reflective behaviours modelled by facilitators of a parenting education intervention have been shown to be carried into participants own parenting (Eames et al., 2010).

5.5.2 Parents as reflective practitioners

As discussed in Chapter Two the concept of supporting parents to develop reflective capacities was discussed as being an influential strategy of parenting interventions (Slade, 2007; Eames et al., 2010). Reflective functioning is the ability for an individual to respond to not only what they see but to their construction of the other person's feelings, hopes and

beliefs, and has been shown to support change in the parent/child relationship (Fonagy & Target, 1997). Importantly the parent must be able to move from a typical external view of the child (i.e. their troublesome behaviour) to viewing their children in relation to their internal experience (Slade, 2007). For example, 'what is causing my child to behave in this way?'Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg & Nix (2009) found that a parent's ability to be less reactive and instead be able to regulate their own parenting responses are aided by the practice of reflective mindfulness.

Participants of this study were engaged in a reflective process, facilitated and modelled by other parents that appeared to excite a 'wondering' about how others feel. The following excerpts illustrate participants' awareness of their children's needs and feelings, and how these can be acknowledged by changing how they respond to their children:

> …To understand the children's feelings as well as my own feelings. I didn't really give him much [previously], like I'd be cooking tea and then I'd say 'ah wait a minute, sing to the baby'. And now I've got to explain it more. That's what they [parent facilitators] said, to explain it more. To actually remember that he might need an explanation. Then he waits till I've finished what I have to do. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

> …being able to realise that they're people and somehow manage it correctly, so when I , see when I can do it I, you know, and I can actually take time to interact with them and hear them, that's when I think I'm being ok as a mum (Neci, BAP Participant)

Both participants quoted above were able to describe that children, like adults, are capable of experiencing feelings. It is known that if a parent's reflective mindfulness can result in them regulating their own parenting responses therefore being less reactive (Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg & Nix, 2009). In so doing, these parents are developing their own capacity as critical thinkers (Heath & Palm, 2006), building their own awareness and personal discovery through observation and reflection.

Within the context of a peer-to-peer learning framework called intergroup dialogue, a dialogic approach to learning, Nagda and Gurin (2007) argue that becoming a critically conscious learner is a developmental process that cannot be imposed on the learner. Nagda and Gurin's (2007) research considered the 'intergroup dialogue' bringing together students across social identity groups that included cultural and power differences, to raise awareness of inequalities in the groups. They found that students participating in similar reflective learning processes reported they were thinking more about their social group

membership and also thinking in a more complex way about broader influences on their behaviours. Nagda and Gurin (2007) concluded that the process of students inquiring into how their experiences were influenced by broader contexts, helped build individual's awareness of their own sense of humanity and their interconnectedness with others. Likewise, in this study, the reflective activity evident in participants' interactions with their children following the parenting intervention showed parents were reflecting on the feelings of their children, and the impact of their own interactions with their children.

Participants in this study often used the word 'thinking' to describe their own use of reflection. The purposeful action of critical reflection appeared to be modelled across the peer-led intervention in this study, and was illuminated time and again by participants as a way of 'thinking'. They consistently reported their awareness of thinking differently as illuminated in the following excerpts:

> This course just made me feel really really good because you're thinking… (Giulia, BAP Participant)
>
> …I'm thinking about their [children's] feelings behind their behaviour. (Annabelle, BAP Participant)
>
> … Like it just takes a little bit of thinking… It's certainly made me think completely differently about how I approach things. (Aileen, BAP Participant)
>
> I've actually stopped yelling at my kids when they were being naughty and that, in a calm voice just tell them what they're doing wrong and that now. Because I'm thinking and not yelling at them and just telling them to go to their room or I make sure that I let them know what they've done. Ah it's a lot easier. It's made a lot difference there, cos he was always stressed at the end of the day and now he's not and he just goes better to sleep. (Dianna, BAP participant)

As the data above indicates, participants in this study regularly referred to reflective behaviours in their parenting and how it was a vehicle for change in relation to their parenting practice. It was evident that the momentum created by shared and modelled reflective learning through participating in the peer-led intervention, and continued interactions through the Child and Family Centres, supported a common and recognizable culture of reciprocal learning. Cecilia, an EPEC supervisor, explained how learning was a two way process in her work with parents:

> …but sharing that with them [parents], and helping them see I'm learning too, seems to do something. I think it says that we're not that different really (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Just as a professional could recognise the reciprocal learning that occurred between professionals and parents, the parent facilitators also conveyed a similar perception of their shared learning with parent participants through the intervention:

> The facilitator is a learner – a parent learner. We're all still learning from the participants as well in a sense. (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)
>
> I think you're always going to learn from it [facilitating BAP] anyway because any group that you have is going to be different… I mean like I'm learning to do different things and do things in different ways … you just feel as I said there's a lot of light bulb moments. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

Both parent facilitators cited above described themselves as continuing to learn. Given their credibility as a local parent, the parent facilitators appeared to be influential models for the learning of other parents. Their similar perspectives and experiences, shared with participating parents enabled the facilitators to be humble provocateurs, stimulating the learning, reflection and sharing that occurred between themselves and participating parents. Likewise, the perception of themselves as learners, further reinforced by the professionals in their supervision of the parent facilitators, appeared to be reflected in the parent facilitators approach to their facilitation. The curriculum of the peer-led intervention was shared with parent participants through a common practice of thinking and reflecting that was modelled by the parent facilitators:

> It's just that we become more aware. And I really think that it is the reflecting thinking, the awareness of that, which is then moved into being non-judgmental and seeing people as people… (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)
>
> I mean to have this sort of thing [the BAP course] it gives you the opportunity to stop and think that, you know, it doesn't have to be like that, that it can be totally different. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

The practice of stopping and thinking described by Michelle appeared to contribute towards participants arriving at new insights for themselves and their own parenting experiences. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that such learning processes do not need to be formal or planned but rather can appear osmotic or co-incidental, embedded in a social context, through what have been referred to as 'situations of co-participation' (Smith, 2003). The premise of communities of practice is that each social learning community has a domain of interest and membership implies a commitment to the domain (Wenger, 2006). In the case of this study the participants' were committed to and involved in the parent led parenting intervention. This domain of interest gave participants the structure and focus for ongoing

membership to the social learning community which was able to exist beyond the intervention, because of the shared culture of situated learning modelled through the intervention. The process of reflecting on parenting with their peers and purposefully giving time to listen to and think about their children appeared to facilitate new understanding for participants about their children and how they, as parents, reflect on and respond to their needs:

> I'd fly off the handle [in the past] for silly little things you know and after doing the course it made me sort of sit back and, … it was like hey the little things like that really don't matter. … made me think, it's more about listening to them, you know like you'd normally say, they'd be trying to talk to you and you'd say, 'Yes yes yes,' you know and just sort of answer them and not really listen to what they were saying. Now I've learnt to sort of just sit there and actually listen to what they're trying to tell you and then they're happy cos they've actually had my attention. (Angela, BAP Participant)
>
> I think my relationship with each child is different, is stronger because I'm thinking about their feelings behind their behaviour. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)
>
> …since doing this course it's um, I just feel really passionate about looking after and bringing up great kids you know and it's not that hard, it really isn't that hard. Like it just takes a little bit of thinking. You got to think! It lets you read your children better and understand them better you know like so you can work out why they're cranky with you or they're upset… (Aileen, BAP Participant)

These excerpts provide evidence of the changed parenting practices that can result from parents being purposefully reflective about their own children and how they respond to their children. In addition to changes in parenting practices participants in this study also described changes in their behaviours in other contexts, arising from adaptations of concepts and skills they had acquired through the peer-led parenting intervention.

5.5.3 Replicability of learned concepts in other contexts

Another area in which transformative change was evident for parent participants was the replicability of the newly acquired skills to other contexts. Although the content of the intervention was primarily focused on parent/child relationships, many participants in this study recognised that concepts and practices they had acquired were not mutually exclusive to parenting but equally beneficial to other relationships and settings as described by Sally:

> I now tell the doctor what I need and what I've noticed. I go with a list and make sure she hears what I'm thinking rather than just sitting there and doing what she tells me" (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

It has been shown that parenting education can enable some participants to experience a sense of control in their lives, experience new ways of thinking about their lives, being more proactive in problem solving, and thinking critically about their own situations (First & Way, 1995).

Beyond their own parenting practice participants were able to identify areas where they behaved differently in other relationships, as a result of using skills and concepts they discovered through their participation in the peer-led intervention. Angela recalled how the intervention's focus on purposefully listening to one's children was a skill that was effective in adult relationships:

> If I'm talking to someone like [name] and I laugh about it all the time because we're always butting in on each other's conversation you know being really good friends. But now I try and sit back and just listen to what other people are saying rather than saying, 'Oh yeah I've been there and I've done all that', instead of bringing it back onto me all the time. (Angela, BAP Participant)

Similarly, Aileen explained her own discovery of replicating the skill she had practiced of listening to children and found it had the same effect when exercised in other relationships:

> I find it quite hard to explain, because [previously] I wouldn't take as much notice, I don't think. Like, I'd listen to people without listening... (Aileen, BAP Participant)

Participants' awareness of the possibility of replicating key concepts and skills appears to be connected to their confidence in practicing the concepts in the first instance; their success in applying the concepts in their parenting practice; and their confidence to apply them in other social contexts. As one parent explained, "This isn't something that I'll just use for my kids" (Angela, BAP Participant). Other participants were able to articulate how they began to practice newly learnt communication skills in their interactions with other adults:

> I got so much out of all of it… Yeah I will take it forward and I think it's going to make my life a whole lot easier because I feel I can communicate with people better. Like you can tell people how you feel without upsetting them, but making them aware of how they make you feel. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

> I didn't realize it [modelling] had that much of an impact but it does. Talking to that parent that no-one else talks to. Before I probably would have just passed by that person. Everyone just deserves to be treated with respect. I know that personally now, and I know the effect of it. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

In addition to participants reporting an improvement in their communication with other adults, some parent participants described how the experience of the parenting intervention had helped them implement significant changes outside of their parenting and social relationships:

> So much has happened since then. I've rung Polytechnic now, I actually did make a phone call and I'm going to do the teacher's aide course … I'm so excited about it too, as I said I haven't done any study for a long time and it scares the absolute hell out of me. (Angela, BAP Participant)

> ... Now I'm working here five days per fortnight as a centre assistant doin data, cooking, greeting and all that. [Workers name] said to me 'they [other parents] take it so much better from you'. I think it's because she walked in the door as a worker and I walked in the door as a parent and as a friend first and then became a worker. Because I got to build that relationship first, it doesn't seem quite so, 'us and them' you know. (Aileen, BAP participant)

> I didn't even finish grade nine you know, so I didn't feel that [pause], I just felt like it was out of my league, like I wasn't confident enough to, you know…, you see other facilitators and stuff like that. And they so know what they're talking about and know what they're doing and I just never ever thought that that would be me. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

> Well, one thing led to another thing and after being out of work and stuck at home by myself – a single mum, autistic kid, can't go anywhere… now look at me. BAP facilitator, workin in the CFC, on the committee and it goes on. I've just got the job cleaning the centre and they call me to do the centre assistant work sometimes. (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

From the perspective of social learning theory (Bandura, 2000), the motivation evident in participants experiences described above, would likely help reinforce and guide their actions, reinforced by their beliefs in their own efficacy. Sustained over time and supported by other parents, the effect of feeling more efficacious could provide the impetus for helping parents embed new learning into their everyday parenting practice. However, it is necessary to examine what is required to sustain newly acquired skills or behaviours as it is known that learners, over time, can drift away new practices (Regehr & Myopoulos, 2008).

5.5.4 Avoiding practice drift: Sustaining newly learned parenting behaviours

In order for new practices to be sustained, the learner needs to identify the relevance of the concepts to their own situation, and be able to apply the learning in other settings through repeated practice (Bandura, 1969). One parent facilitator described the need for desired parenting behaviours to be a part of her modelled behaviour as she was responsible for teaching other parents to use the same practices. However, she was also able to articulate the drift that occurs in the journey towards acquiring new skills and embedding them into one practice:

> I went through BAP and it was great. I learnt stuff about what I could do with my children to help with their behaviour and it worked. Like watching the facilitators do the role play on the 'when you do this… it makes me feel…' stuff, instead of just shouting all the time. It really worked! Over time I forgot to do it at home and the shouting started again. Then I was lucky to do the parent facilitator training and I discovered it again. I thought, 'that's right, I remember I was doing that at home'. I don't know why I stopped doing it again. In doing the facilitator course I decided I will try harder and do those things more often. I did, and they still worked, but over time I stopped doing them and the shouting and yelling happened again. Then I started being a BAP facilitator and in facilitating the course, I was doing the course for the third time. I kicked myself that I had let these things that work with the kids, start and then die out. **Well, now they are a part of me**. If I'm going to teach other people about it, I have to really be it. I'm doin' it all the time now and I think it is becoming a part of me. I can teach other parents about these things cos that's what I do and practice at home. Funny to think that I can now help others discover this stuff." (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

When parents like Sally are supported to continue learning through rehearsal and practice, this can contribute to a more lasting application of parenting practices that promote positive outcomes for their children (Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik & MacKinnon, 2011). On her own journey towards the acquisition of new skills, Sally's experience reflects a wave like pattern which involved the discovery of a concept, application of it in practice, experiencing success in its use, followed by a return to previous practices. Over time she drifted away from the new practice. A study conducted by Regehr and Myopoulos (2008) focused on professionals and their self-directed learning found that the adult learner can experience 'practice drift'. That is, over time the learner can take shortcuts or suboptimal approaches through 'practice drift' that moves away from the new practice. Regehr and Myopoulos assert that practice improvement needs to be linked to reflective practice-based learning (2008). Indeed, Sally's reflection of her own learning journey and experiences of

'practice drift' may have supported her to embed new practices to the point that they became a part of her subconscious repertoire of parenting behaviours.

Freire (2005) emphasised the necessary relationship between reflection and action in order to alter ones reality. Praxis - the act of exercising, or acting on the new learning, is the intersection of reflection and action. However, as with any newly learnt skill, all learners can inadvertently slip back to old habits and behaviours because they are difficult to change and they are not always exercised consciously (Lea, Cadman & Philo, 2015). One participant articulated the process of a newly acquired parenting skill changing from something she had to consciously remind herself to practice, to something she would do unconsciously:

> I'd have to lie to say that I don't slip back because you do slip back. Sometimes your minds' just not in the right place … but the same thing, I mean, it gets that way. Eventually… it comes natural, so you don't even know you're doing it. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

As a parent facilitator, Michelle had the opportunity to continue recalling and practicing core concepts covered in the intervention. Through continued practice Michelle was therefore able to experience exercising the new behaviours as natural parenting responses. Another parent described her own strategies to maintain a focus on keeping her learning alive following the intervention:

> … like I was taking notes myself, and even to this day I go back to those sessions that we have done and I'm thinking, 'Oh I can jot more things down on the piece of paper,' … I go back to it because it's my confidence, to build up my confidence, and also like I can go back and thinking back to the situations that we had all the eight weeks. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

Giulia identified the value of using notes from the interventions sessions as a touchstone to check her thinking and application of parenting concepts and ideas that she wished to continue practicing. Participants received a variety of summary handouts for each of the eight sessions. Parents were also encouraged to write their own reflective journals to record ideas that were personally relevant. However, Giulia also had the benefit of continued interaction with other participants from the intervention to help sustain her practices. This poses the question, how might participants sustain new practices when they do not have the same continued peer support? One participant who did not have the opportunity to interact with others beyond the course highlighted the possible negative

impact for parents when follow-up support and ongoing involvement between stakeholders was not possible:

> I was just going to say it'd be nice if there was, down the line, a follow up course to just get together with everyone and see how they're going. I don't know if anything like that comes out of it? (Lilly, BAP participant)

Later in the same conversation Lilly provided an example of how she had begun to forget key points of learning that she had taken from the peer-led parenting intervention which had concluded two months previously, again reinforcing the importance of follow up opportunities:

> **Lilly -** I compare myself to other mums. There's another mum who I think is wonderful and a couple of different ones. I think "Oh she wouldn't do this so far as health goes", and another one is very devoted parent and [child's name] always …she [daughter] will point it out sometimes that you know "this is us and don't compare to other mums" sort of thing.
>
> **Interviewer** - So what is the benefit of learning not to compare yourself to other mums?
>
> **Lilly** - Well then you don't beat yourself up because you're not good enough, that you're not doing as well as someone else perhaps. I mean you can still learn from the other mums but you don't need to, um, you know, measure yourself against them.
>
> **Interviewer** – Ok
>
> **Lilly -** Yeah it's good that you reminded me about that actually because yeah I forget about that
>
> **Interviewer -** Well it's interesting isn't it. That we can learn stuff and discover stuff and over time we can lose it if we're not reminded about it?
>
> **Lilly –** Yes, yes that's right. Well sometimes you need a checklist don't you? Well I think it would help if I went through my notes.
>
> **Interviewer** - ok
> **Lilly –** Or even write down some things - Yes, some little, yeah reminders on the fridge and things
>
> **Interviewer –** Like?
>
> **Lilly -** Yes yes - some affirmations. Yes we had, well I mean we got some great notes and what not, but yes the affirmation idea is a good idea.

The experience offered by Lilly of drifting back to previous perspectives and behaviours reinforces the assertion of Lea, Cadman and Philo (2015) that our behavioural habits are difficult to change because they occur subconsciously. Lilly was able to identify actions she

could implement to recall, practice and sustain concepts and skills she encountered through the intervention. However, this was only prompted by the occurrence of the final interview two months following her completion of the peer-led intervention. The process of recalling the content and learning, through the interview, triggered reminders for Lilly to implement overt strategies that might keep the learning alive. This again highlights the importance of ongoing practice to embed new learning. Without the benefit of ongoing modelling and practice within a learning community, parents like Lilly could lose their newly acquired skills and concepts. This reinforces the importance of ensuring parent participants of parenting interventions have support beyond the initial program to recall and practice newly acquired knowledge and skills. This might consist of formal service support networks, supportive social networks, or the benefit of membership to an informal community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as discussed earlier in this chapter.

5.5.5 Transformed perspectives through a reflective social learning community

The ongoing interactions between parents, and with professionals, evident in this study, appeared to perform more than just a social or parent support function for participants. Through these informal encounters, individuals continued to practice and exchange artefacts (Wenger, 2010) from the parenting intervention that helped facilitate continued learning and reflection and ultimately contributed to some participants reporting transformative experiences.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, data from this study illustrates the use of 'identity resources' (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) shared between parent participants both during and following the parenting intervention. Examples of these include concepts like the phrase 'good enough parent' (Winnicott, 1953) and the 'full jug / empty jug' analogy which related to the emotional, physical and psychological energy parents need to meet the needs of their children. Additionally, the common practice of reflection that continued to occur between participants', through social encounters, is another identity resource participants frequently reported employing. The Child and Family Centres appeared to perform an important function as a physical place in which participants and their children could continue interacting together, strengthening relationships and continuing to reflectively learn from each other beyond the peer-led intervention.

Participants of this study indicated that ongoing interactions with other parents enabled them to strengthen their connections and recall key concepts from the intervention and encourage them to reflect on their own use of them:

> … It made us closer though you know doing that [BAP] at the same time as well. (Angela, BAP Participant)

> I've thought about this anyway, you know from even when we started it [the course], just to learn that. Like I said, I'm not alone in some of the feelings that I have and that I might get some tips from other mums like how to deal with certain situations with kids. (Neci, BAP participant)

Through their ongoing informal interactions in the Child and Family Centres, participants' also recognised that their ongoing information exchange and learning continued to support them to sustain new parenting concepts. This is highlighted by Giulia experience described below:

> We all keep on sharing the things we did learn in there. It just happens like that when we get into the centre together. We all experience some same things and can bring it, share it together. (Giulia, BAP participant)

Participants also recognised the use of concepts and behaviours they had acquired though the parenting intervention being exercised by others they encountered through the CFC's. A parent and a professional who participated in this study describe their experience:

> We call it a common language. Anyone can use it to talk inside and outside the BAP course. People who haven't even done BAP, you hear them explaining what the 'filling the jug' concept is to others. It crosses everywhere whether you are a worker or parent. Sometimes even those who haven't done BAP you hear them say 'my jug is just so empty'. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

> Well I went to see, um, the nurse with [child's name]. I was real shirty and tired and that and I think she could see it. As she was lookin at the bub she said 'what do you do to fill ya jug?' And she wasn't even a part of BAP but she knew that we say that about looking after yourself. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

Dianna, was struck by the familiar terminology and concept of 'filling your jug', introduced to her through the intervention and later being exercised by a professional worker in a different context. This data suggests the existence of an informal learning community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) through the interactions that occurred between a variety of parents and professionals. Continued interactions of this kind helped parents like Dianna keep practicing her newly parenting skills enabling them to become a part of her parenting practice.

Energised by the opportunity to continue learning with others through a variety of reflective social encounters, some participants were able to recognise that their changed perspectives and behaviours arose from their continued reflection, awareness, and openness to change:

> It's just that we become more aware. I really think that it is the reflecting thinking, the awareness of that, which is then moved into being nonjudgmental and seeing people as people, you know, not a background, not a culture, not a race, not a stigma attached to somebody because of the area that they live in. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

Several participants' in this study articulated their 'membership' to an informal social learning community. The use of a common language, shared concepts, and parents modelling reflective behaviours for each other, were examples of 'artefacts' (Wenger, 2010) that promoted learning amongst members of their loose community of practice:

> …and it's brought everyone together as a community too you know. Like because if it wasn't for this course I wouldn't have met all these mums, like I didn't know [names four participants] or any of them before we did this course. I had never set eyes on them before. And now we're all on common ground…. like bringing everyone together, you know, like it's hopefully it'll become a language that all these parents will be able to talk together. Oh it'll be great. (Aileen, BAP participant)

> It's been good. I mean it's very, it really gets you to think and be aware - Well, for me myself, just my own parenting style, but also being aware that yeah everybody's going through something different. Oh there are varying ways of coping with things, but also varying ways of um I suppose understanding things too. (Neci, BAP Participant)

These examples from participants' experiences reflect an informally occurring learning context for parents that served to reinforce a shared language. 'Communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998) has evolved from its initial focus within an educational context to be referred to in all manner of organisational development and human resource management contexts (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007). Roberts (2006) concedes communities of practice can perform a useful function in small, less structured contexts, but questions the interaction of such a community within a formal organisational structure as a knowledge management tool. These sometimes emerge as artificially constructed interest groups that lack vitality or rigour. This study however, documents communities of practice as an organic example of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that illuminated the dynamic process of voluntary social participation and an energy and

vibrancy in shared learning reported by participants. This vibrant, energy evident in the participants' experiences has been described by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder as 'aliveness' (2002).

Within this study sustained practice and reflection in the community of practice also led to some participants recognising that their own previous perspectives had being challenged and, over time, transformed. This resonates with the concept of 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1978) in which renewed perspectives can arise from perspectives being challenged. Mezirow defined perspective transformation as:

> the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1990, p.14)

Examples of new perspectives and behaviours evident through much of the data in this chapter correspond with Freire's (2005) assertion that reflection, as a necessary component of learning, helps the learner to see the world as a reality in the process of transformation rather than a static reality. Mezirow (1978) argued that adult development and learning involves a reorganisation of how one looks at themselves and their relationships in order to identify what needs to change. Such action is supported through an ability to critically examine previously held feelings and assumptions which can ultimately lead to transformed perspectives (Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow also argued that new perspectives are most often prompted by "an externally imposed disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1990, p.13). In the context of this study, the disorienting dilemma could be the experience of the parenting intervention and through the continued reflective interactions with other parents, individual participant's realised what they needed to change for themselves and their families.

Whilst some participants reported an increased awareness of their own perceptions of others, it was also evident that participants' new perspectives could help them implement changes in their own lives. One participant's new awareness provided the impetus for her to challenge conditions and behaviours in her intimate relationship that and facilitated her previous isolation. She confidently described an encounter with her partner in which she confronted his behaviours:

> I grew and I controlled the situation better and I know I have the right to control it which also put me in a better position with my husband. … I said to him 'I sought my father out in you'. A lot of people do that stuff. It's what I know, it's what I relate to. I also said, 'I had to get away from my father when I was 16-17. Is this message getting clear to you? Continue on the path of controlling and I'll tell you now that a mother is meant to protect her children and I will not allow you to bully or parent in a way that you felt hurt by your own father. I will not stand by and watch that.' And I said, 'if that means I've got to leave to protect my children, I will'. Because he had quite a traumatic childhood as well. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

Karen's account of the conversation with her partner reflected a confidence and awareness that enabled her to begin to assert new terms in their relationship. The concept of adopting and sustaining new perspectives and behaviours has been explored in contemporary feminist literature. Karen's emboldened stance in asserting conditions in her marital relationship reflects a post-structural feminist perspective, viewing change as resulting from dominant discourses being challenged and new understandings and meanings emerging (Webb & Macdonald, 2007). Through graduating as participants of a peer-led intervention and becoming parent facilitators, some participants in this study, like Karen, were able bring into existence new meaning for themselves and those close to them. As a parent facilitator, Karen would have been able to address this personal difficulty with the knowledge that she had access to the reflective learning community of peers and professional workers that had emerged out of involvement in the peer-led parenting intervention.

5.5.6 A transformational learning community: Reflection as a practice between parents and professionals

The shared reflective behaviours that were evident between professionals and parents in this study appeared to help nurture what Freire referred to as 'critical consciousness' (2005). This is more than just awareness. The continued shared practices helped provide the necessary conditions for persistent changed practice required for new practices to be sustained (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). Every encounter parents had with others (children, parents, professional workers, and family members) provided a context in which new practices could be sustained through practice and subsequent reflection. One parent described the nature of the informal, even coincidental encounters that provided such conditions:

> I'm part of a community. Things get aired and talked about and people get encouraged too – it's not as scary as you might originally think. It is kind of a natural progression… All the little things along the way. The steps you take along the way that get people in too – I guess like a different perspective of what goes on or how life is, or that it's easier to do. We talk with the staff about things and they share with us too. Like it's not so confronting learning in this type of environment [Child and Family Centre] because your friends are going in to do things or, standing around with people you know so it is easier to get involved, easier to pick things up. (Aileen, BAP participant).

Aileen described the informal shared exchanges between stakeholders (parents and workers), learning that was shared with peers and professionals as encouraging and not confronting. These types of learning interactions contributed to a shared culture of practice, employing reflective behaviours as the vehicle for learning together. Indeed, reflection in this context was an 'identity resource' (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) and a shared 'artefact' (Wenger, 2010) that helped define the learning community's practice. What emerged from this process was a recognisable learning community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) that had the potential to influence new understandings for members of the reflective learning community and potentially influence the service context through which the community evolved.

As discussed previously, parent participants continued to interact with each other and professionals beyond the peer-led intervention. The parent facilitators provided a 'boundary-spanning' (Korschun, 2015; Aldrich & Herker, 1977) role, linking parents and service providers as one community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through their continued interactions, participants' provided ongoing encouragement and reflective support to each other in adopting a common language and artefacts from their shared learning experience. The following data provides examples from participants' perspectives of how this occurred:

> We [professional workers and parents] have a 'cuppa and chat' every week where we pose a question each week. Everyone has a say and puts their ideas forward. It's a shared thing like we all have those 'oh what a good idea' type thing. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

> We get together and talk about whether we've used any of the skills that we learnt at the course and things like that. It helps us remember all the things. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

These participants' reference to a collective 'we' helps illuminate their perception of belonging to a learning practice alongside professionals. They described a shared practice of reflection and learning from each other, and with professionals. As discussed earlier in

this chapter, participants regularly commented on their increased awareness of their individual reflection about their children and their parenting. Participants most often referred to this as 'thinking'. The practice of reflection was practiced and reinforced for participants through their ongoing encounters with peers and professionals:

> I really think that it is the reflecting thinking… I've always been quite a reflective person but now I'm more aware of it and take more notice of my reflection. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)
>
> …like it just takes a little bit of thinking. You got to think! (Aileen, BAP Participant)
>
> It makes me think about things differently and do things differently. (Group 2 participant)

The practice of stopping and wondering (thinking and reflecting) was modelled through the intervention at all levels of supervision and learning. A reflective culture of learning was modelled and encouraged by both the professional workers and parent facilitators. Despite the benefits for participants' feeling of belonging and shared learning, the shared culture of reflection could potentially have an opposing exclusionary effect for other parents not involved. From a critical perspective, professionals and parents collaborating in shared and ongoing practices, must remain aware of the possibility of inadvertently constructing and collaborating together in a hierarchical dynamic of 'insider' / 'outsider' (Pike, 1954, as cited by Headland, 1990) to the detriment of other families on the peripheries. This dilemma is mentioned in this chapter as the researcher's ongoing contact with parents, through the service environments where the research took place, resulted in occasions where he observed the exclusion of other parents:

> I was talking with two parents at [Child and Family Centre] today who said they hope to be able to do the BAP course one day. I asked them why. Their response was that other past participants had told them that it will help them understand things on a completely different level. I asked them what they think the others meant by this. They weren't really sure but hinted at the fact that they felt like they were 'on the outside' and by doing BAP they will then 'understand' and feel more included. It occurred to me that there was a suggestion of 'exclusion' in what they shared. The notion of not having access to what others have appears to unintentionally create a hierarchy of privilege – the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Perhaps a social clique has evolved through the process that might present barriers to the engagement of other parents. (Researcher reflective journal, February 2015)

This incident helped illustrate that unintended negative effects can result from well intended, reflective learning contexts. This reflects an argument in relation to the potential

limitations of communities of practice asserting that the context in which a community of practice exists plays a significant role in influencing the creation and transfer of knowledge and the degree of trust necessary for this to occur (Roberts, 2006). Roberts' assertion draws attention to the importance of the reflective learning relationships, evident in this study between parents and professional workers, being characterised by trust, equality and reciprocity.

A primary finding of this thesis is that the model of a structured and supported peer to peer learning context can contribute significantly to parent participants skill development, confidence and engagement with parenting services. The active participation of parents within parent support services as facilitators of a peer-led parenting intervention provided parent participants with an alternative to traditional expert led parenting education programs.

5.5.7 'Just one of us': Parents learning from peers

The concept of learning from peers appeared to help participants in this study view themselves as co-learners alongside other parents as opposed to being recipients of the expertise or prescriptions of professionals who have traditionally held greater power or authority. The partnership between learners evident in this study reflects current understandings of partnership models in parenting services in which differing knowledge bases are brought into play between the professionals and parents (Hopwood, 2016). Whilst this occurred in this study, the distinctive point of difference was the partnership between parents as facilitators and parents as participants in the peer-led intervention. In contrast to traditional parent/professional partnerships, the relationship of parent facilitator and parent participant is arguably predicated on a more equitable foundation given the similar everyday experiences shared by both parties. The sameness conveyed by local parents facilitating a program for other parents appeared to give credibility to the service in the eyes of participants. Some participants spoke of the parent facilitators as equals whose personal experiences resonated with their own:

> I know they [parent facilitators] had kids like they got three or four kids and I only got two and they go through like a different phase and I felt good because I'm thinking 'gee I'm not the only one' you know with these problems. I can talk to them and one of those facilitators actually came up and she gave me a hug and it just felt really good because the manager
> [EPEC Supervisor], she saw this and she hugged me too. (Giulia, BAP

Participant)

> …and they [facilitators] were just normal everyday average Joe's, you know which I just think is wonderful. (Aileen, BAP participant)

> But you felt really included as part of a group, it wasn't like them and us. … They [parent facilitators] were just the same as us. They walked in in jeans and casual clothes, they were just, you know, they introduced themselves and 'this is my kids and this is that,' and their kids aren't perfect either…and the way they [parent facilitator] did it they made us think 'oh this is what we do do' or 'this is what we thought we were doing wrong' and you know that's just all perfectly normal and they were just … parents themselves you know… You don't feel like you're going into like a classroom atmosphere, it was just like really relaxing. I felt at home. (Angela, BAP Participant)

In addition, the parent facilitators wanted to be viewed the same way as highlighted in the excerpts below:

> I want all the parents to just relax and say "well she is just one of us" at the end of the day… In the group I just finished, I think they expected older teachers, who did not have kids of their own, who would come in and just teach them stuff… it makes a massive difference that they are hearing stuff about parenting from another mother. (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

> You're not telling them what to do. You're not telling them. You're showing them. Guiding them through a course … you're opening their minds as to what's going on. You just take that time to stop and think as to what's behind a behaviour and you know, what's behind, what's going on and just give them that time to just stop and think, really… You're teaching but you're not teaching. …Probably as a parent you, you've gone through most of the things that they've gone through, and I think you're always, you don't judge. You don't know what they're going through you know. Like their kids are different than my kids. They handle things different from the way I do. So yeah, you're sort of with them. (Michelle, Parent facilitator)

Regardless of their level of involvement in the peer-led intervention, parent participants of this study acknowledged that the experience enabled them to encounter and pass on parenting ideas, knowledge and skills to other parents like themselves. They were effectively exercising a form of 'transformational leadership' amongst their peers, which has been found to lead to growth, independence and empowerment for those influenced by the leadership (Kark et al., 2003). The same authors found that 'personal identification' with a leader is more influential in supporting individual change than 'social identification', (Kark et al., 2003). This would suggest that parents in this study have been influenced through their personal identification with the parent facilitators. It may be easier for a parent

participant, in a parenting intervention, to identify personally with another parent than a professional.

This study reinforces the understanding that parents are more likely to engage with parenting interventions when they know and trust others involved (Axford et al., 2012). As discussed in chapter two, trust repair efforts by organisations are enhanced by the involvement of a trusted third party (Bozic, 2017). Although Bozic (2017) was referring to the compensatory repair efforts of corporates to restore trust with consumers, the same concept is transferable to the context of parent support. Program credibility can be enhanced by the presence of workers to whom participants can personally relate and provide participants with role models (Bess & Doykos, 2014). As workers within the system and parents from the community, the parent facilitators performed a vital boundary-spanning (Korschun, 2015; Aldrich & Herker, 1977) role in connecting services and the local community of parents traditionally viewed by services as 'hard to reach' (Evangelou et al., 2013). As identified in a study by Cojocaru and Cojocaru (2011), a parent educator's social proximity and responsiveness to parent participants can help ensure a more balanced power dynamic in their relationship. The parent facilitators in this study were in a position to support knowledge translation across the parent and service contexts. Research has shown that such a knowledge translation function across different contexts can play an important role in helping shape the local service context (Evans & Scarbrough, 2014). Knowledge translation between both the parent and service provider communities appeared to be enabled through the function of the triadic relationship between parent participants, parent facilitators and professional workers. The nature of relationships between all three groups was not only strengthened through informal reflective conversations but also a formal supervision process.

Reflective supervision provided for all parent facilitators facilitating the parenting program enabled them to enter into a form of relational pedagogy (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006) whereby they were supported to connect personal and theoretical knowledge. In this process, the learner can call on their own experience (relational modes of knowing) as well as the thinking of theorists (impersonal modes of knowing).
This encourages more sophisticated ways of knowing (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006). At the same time, each parent facilitator's continued identity as a local parent could challenge and possibly dismantle the notion of 'the other' (de Beauvoir, 1952; Griffin, 1981) which

Johnson et al., (2004) argue is deeply embedded in everyday discourse of professionals. The concept of peer-led parent learning appeared to enable changes in how participants constructed parenting in addition to challenging their previous constructions of the service system. The examples below illustrate participants' perceptions of the different in local parents facilitating the intervention:

> They're just one of us that go through the same things and the, you know, I would so much prefer to do, to sit down and talk to someone who has learnt by trial and error and has learnt by being hands on with something as opposed to someone who's learnt something going through university or taught with the whole chalk board teaching. These people have been through what we're going through … but you felt really included. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

> You don't feel like you're going into a classroom atmosphere. It was just like really relaxing. I felt at home…they're putting thoughts into us and then it all just comes out, you know, and because they're [parent facilitators] giving as well… it was just real. But you felt really included as part of the group. It wasn't like them and us! (Angela, BAP Participant)

> …they would be like 'she were just an everyday parent like I was and now she's facilitating the course'. (Karen, Parent Facilitator).

> The parents say 'hey this woman who's done the course is just a mum at home and now she's done the facilitator training.' (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

Having moved through levels of accredited training to assume a role as a paid worker, the parent facilitator can straddle both the service and parent community as 'brokers of both communities' (Wenger, 2000). In so doing, they become a credible conduit between local families and the service system, and can introduce elements of practice from one community into another (Wenger, 2000). Wenger cautions that the process of brokering knowledge is delicate. It requires enough legitimacy to be listened to and sufficient distance to bring something new (2000). Through their employed status within the service system, parent facilitators in this study had a definite point of difference from other parents accessing the system. Being a parent who would also be accessing services, parent facilitators could maintain the legitimacy of being a parent:

> It made it real. It made - you weren't being talked at by some professional women that you know, letters after their name! You knew that the people you were talking to had been in the same boat as you I think. (Aileen, BAP participant)

> Like she'd [parent facilitator] come out with some of these funny little scenarios that had happened at home and things like that and we'd think 'oh thank God' you

> know it wasn't just [me], it happens in her house as well as happening here. It was just nice that it was other parents you know, rather than just sit there and listen. It's like 'oh' you know, you feel like you could actually give a little bit more input. (Angela, BAP Participant)

These comments attest to the fact that participants viewed the parent facilitators as credible given their current parenting roles whilst also employed within the service system. As parent facilitators, working alongside professionals, provided parents, and services, with an alternate approach to parenting support that reflected partnership with parents and potentially enabled engagement with parents who had previously found services difficult to access.

5.6 Transforming approaches to parenting education

When this research took place the peer-led parenting intervention, was predominantly facilitated by female parent facilitators. Their presence as co-workers in the local service system provides an example of effective co-working partnership between both professionals and parents. This study illuminates a blurring of the intersections between worker and parent and provides a foundation for challenging traditional service paradigms that may have perpetuated inequality in parent/professional relationships. Through their work alongside professionals, parent facilitators could challenge traditional structures and deficit discourses.

This study demonstrates the opportunity for transformation of individuals moving from being recipients to contributors, transforming themselves, their intimates and the system they found themselves working within. Boyd (2010) cautions that a female's contribution to the system may still be reliant on the generosity of other social or family structures, such as bearing some of the responsibilities associated with parenting. Boyd argues that without these, her ability to make choices for herself remains constrained (2010) as there is an implicit set of values that are reinforced through the way services and social policy are conceptualised that lay the foundation for inequitable social hierarchies. This argument is even more complex when considering social hierarchies as interlocking systems of oppression which Hill Collins referred to as 'intersectionality' (1998). The concept of intersectionality implies that viewing gender, race and class, as independent social hierarchies, is not accurate as each of these mutually construct and reinforce the other (Hill Collins, 1998). She argues that it is through these hierarchies that we all learn our assigned place, believing them to be naturally rather than socially constructed. Further, it has been

asserted that hierarchy is inevitably male-led and privileges masculinity as authority (Boyd, 2010). However, this study acknowledges the role of women as profound conveyors and facilitators of new knowledge and practices. This represents a hegemonic reversal of the traditional service stereotype. A shift from exclusionary to inclusionary 'othering' (Weis, 1995; Canales, 2000) was evident in this study, with previous recipients of a parent support intervention assuming roles as co-workers within the same intervention.

Most parent facilitators in this study lived in the same communities in which they were also facilitating the course. Parent facilitators described their perceptions of their roles as facilitators, in terms of being surprised that they were able to perform the role competently:

> You see other facilitators, they so know what they're talking about and know what they're doing. I just never ever thought that that would be me. …well I didn't think I was really educated, as far as school work, like schooling and that I didn't think. There was lots of things happening when I was a kid but I didn't even finish grade nine you know, so I just felt like it [becoming a facilitator] was out of my league, like I wasn't confident enough… (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

> … now look at me. BAP facilitator, workin in the Child and Family Centre, on the committee and it goes on. I've just got the job cleaning the centre and they call me to do the centre assistant work sometimes. (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

Equipped with new skills and knowledge, and a defined role within the local system, a significant transformation appeared to occur for parent facilitators as they assumed a place as co-workers in the delivery of the parenting intervention. Working with each other, and parallel to professionals, the parent facilitators contributed their unique local knowledge, newly acquired skills, and parenting experience to their working partnership. Their relationships with professionals demonstrated another model of relational agency (Edwards, 2005), extending the dynamic beyond what occurs between professionals. Whilst it is not dissimilar from the interaction of professionals sharing and acknowledging expertise in working towards a common goal, the expertise and specialist knowledge in this instance is not born of academic rigor and specialist work. Rather it emanates from the 'practice wisdom' (Klein & Bloom, 1994) that emanates from the lived experience of the parent co-worker. The unique co-working relationship between parents and professionals enabled what Edwards refers to as intersecting practices (2011) in which those involved (parents & professionals) developed collective capabilities through relationships and their shared sense of belonging (Duhn, Fleer & Harrison, 2016). Duhn, Fleer and Harrison (2016) argue that engagement can occur through this common learning dynamic and sense of

belonging, enabling a negotiation of difference and the emergence of transformed practice. Whilst the work of Duhn et al., (2016) focuses on relational agency that exists between professionals, it also resonates strongly with the relational agency evident between parents and professionals in this study. The following excerpts describe relational agency as evident in the work between professionals and parent facilitators alike:

> Community members get it quite quickly. Some services struggle with the concept though. The course [peer-led intervention] is the perfect model for workers and parents to truly practice and reinforce new ways working together. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)
>
> … just different roles but learning the same things. It's like we're a team of learners – BAP participants, parent facilitators, and supervisors – we're all just learning! (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)
>
> I don't think it would work if it was just professionals running the course because it would be a teachy experience. It would be like the experts coming in to teach. But I am just a mother that hasn't had a job for over 12 years… (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

This study observed a practice partnership between professional workers and parents resulting in bridging a traditional void that had existed between parents– 'the other' as described by de Beauvoir (1952), and the professional, in communities characterised by disadvantage. It provides evidence of the potentially transformative effect for parents and services through parents stimulating the learning of other parents both formally (facilitating an intervention) and informally (ongoing casual reflective learning between professional workers and parents).

5.7 Summary

Transformational experiences of individual parents and the transformational possibilities for parenting support services that can occur through the evolution of jointly shared reflective practices, have been examined in this chapter. Evidence has been provided that shows the empowering impact of parents as co-workers in the service system and the potential for such roles to diversify participation of parents in parenting programs and enable interventions to be more relatable to participants. Reflective behaviours were found to be a critical component of the shared practice culture between professionals and participants. This was modelled by professionals, cascading through the work of parent facilitators, and then carried to other parenting and social contexts by parents. This chapter has illuminated the benefits of modelling and embedding a culture of shared reflective

learning between workers and parents. It has drawn attention to the dynamic relationship between three complimentary theoretical perspectives of reflective practice (Schon, 1983; 1987), relational agency (Edwards, 2005) and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998). The rich learning relationships that occurred at the intersections of these frameworks, when practiced between parents and professionals has implications for the provision of parenting education interventions, particularly for services that struggle to engage parents experiencing adversity.

Evidence has been presented in this chapter that suggests the possibility for a reconceptualised model of parenting support that might enhance engagement with families who find services difficult to access. Chapter Six provides an insight into the various issues that intersect and compound disadvantage for families experiencing adversity. The data presented in the next chapter illuminate the cumulative effect of these issues, together with service factors, that can perpetuate disengagement between families and parenting support services. Chapter Six also provides evidence, from the data in this study, of the potential for parents, as co-workers and facilitators in parenting programs, to contribute towards making services more accessible to families who previously have had limited contact with parenting services.

Chapter Six: The engagement conundrum: Barriers and enablers to engaging families in parenting services

6.1 Introduction

Analysis of data collected in this study illuminated factors that compound and complicate the task of parenting for some parents, particularly those parenting children in contexts characterised by disadvantage. A small body of literature suggests there are certain characteristics and circumstances of families which can present as barriers to parent/professional engagement (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012; Katz et al., 2006; Slee, 2006).

In light of this literature, this chapter explores the factors that can hinder engagement between parents and parenting services. One such barrier is the imbalance of power in relationships and the various ways this is experienced by those people who are least powerful (Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014; Standing, 2011; Freire, 2005). The notion of power is explored in this chapter, specifically how it is potentially used in relationships between providers of parenting interventions and those who might be viewed as consumers of those services. The chapter also provides evidence from the data in this study that illuminates some characteristics of parenting services, and professionals, that can facilitate engagement with parents. However, to provide the context for a discussion of the data, it is relevant to firstly consider the range of factors that can cluster together to negatively impact families.

6.2 Factors that compound risk and vulnerability for parents and families

Isolation, stress, poor health and poverty have been found to have a deleterious effect on a parent's ability to parent effectively (La Placa & Corlyon, 2016). As discussed in Chapter Two, these risk factors can cluster together to exacerbate the vulnerability experienced by a family which in turn has the potential to negatively impact on the well-being of children (Raising Children Network, 2014; Gomez & Brown, 2007; Lotz, 2017). Research shows forms of social support can perform a critical function in promoting effective parenting behaviours (Byrnes & Miller, 2012). For instance, it has been shown that stressed parents are more likely to view their interactions with their children more positively when they perceive themselves to have strong social supports (McConnell, Breitkreuz & Savage, 2011).

However, social support is not the panacea for stressed parents as it can be less effective in enhancing parenting behaviours in the most disadvantaged communities given that those offering support may also be the cause of stress (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). In this study, participants' early descriptions of themselves, and their current situations, revealed a strong sense of isolation. Prior to participating in the peer-led intervention, participants were asked about their perceptions of how they were going as parents. Their responses reflected a variety of situations that depict different forms of isolation such as:

> I don't really know how I'm going as a parent. I just battle along. I don't really know. I just take it in me stride and hopefully it works… I just keep the peace and talk to everybody. Pretty much, that's the handful of a life I've got...I was the only single mum there in the group so it was a little bit difficult for me but I got there, it's like, it is hard being a single mum. It takes a while to get used to being a single mum. (Dianna, BAP Participant).
>
> I need a better partner, one that stands by me… I just want to be a lot more happier, and that, for the kids. They don't need to see me if I'm upset or anything. They get upset. It upsets them and they can tell, they can sense that really well… Yeah, hopefully meet someone nice. (Lilly, BAP Participant)
>
> It'd be nice to feel useful again. (Angela, BAP Participant)
>
> You know life could go either way… I'm not [pause], you know, life's always a bit up in the air. (Lane, BAP Participant)

Consistent with much of the research literature participants' perceptions reflected the reality for many parents laden with the demands associated with isolation and experiencing disadvantage (La Placa and Corlyon, 2016; Forrester et al., 2012). Studies have shown that some parents remain disconnected from supports that could benefit them. This may be due to a lack of knowledge about services or insufficient support networks that could make them aware of available services (Winkworth et al., 2010). Data from this study indicated the relative isolation of participants. 50 percent of participants who completed questionnaires in this study indicated they were not sure if their family and friends were available to help if they were struggling in their parenting; one third of participants indicated they were either unsure or didn't know of anyone who could care for their child if they needed to go out in a hurry; and one in five participants were unable to identify any person they could turn to if they needed help. Several participants in this study described their isolation as evidenced in the extracts below:

> I don't have a lot to show, like for my family network around me so we're quite isolated here where I am… We're out in the bush. Ah well! Well there's nothing

> else… I do have people but I don't like to burden, to rely on them too heavily. I do have people but they're just not close by that's the thing. (Lilly, BAP Participant)
>
> In the sessions [BAP course] I just blurted out and I said "I'm sorry" …I had these tears just came suddenly … When you don't have a mother here [pause] or you don't have anyone else to look after your kids, um [pause] if you wanted to go out quickly or, you know, child care costs so much money and everything like that. So um it just feels really um different…. (Giulia, BP Participant)

Another single parent explained an absence of social networks in her community by describing what had occurred in her neighbourhood:

> …people keep to themselves and don't look out for each other …it's actually too quiet here, and nobody would notice if she [child] goes missing…um like we had a situation at the end of last year where some van drove past a child leaving the school, and tried to coax him into the car.
> (Neci, BAP Participant)

The examples of isolation described by participants in this study indicate that some of them did not initially have ready access to social connections that are known to benefit parents. Although they may not be aware of it, most parents with young children depend on social support networks to enable optimal health and well-being outcomes for their children (McConnell, Breitkreuz & Savage, 2011). The social connectedness of an individual can influence their well-being, perceptions, behaviours and ideas (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). The data in this study, discussed in Chapter Five, reinforced the notion that parents' behaviours and self-perceptions were positively influenced through the process of increasing their own social connections and learning alongside others like themselves. In previous generations, people were more closely linked with others through institutions such as faith communities and service clubs. In this era of 'networked individualism' (Wellman, 2001), connections to others are more and more individualised, with fewer people practically within reach when they are most needed by those who are isolated (Blau & Fingerman, 2009). For many parents, feeling unsupported may be stressful enough, however, sources of stress for parents can cluster together and impact negatively on the well-being of parents and their children (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000).

6.2.1 When complex needs cluster together

Many families in Australia experience multiple stressors living with insecurity in relation to housing, jobs, finances, and social entitlements (Victorian Council of Social Service, 2015b). In addition, individuals and groups that have few resources are often negatively

stereotyped and viewed as failures in the broader community (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). Standing (2011) argues that such people are forced to act opportunistically with little political bargaining power. The data presented in the remainder of this chapter includes several examples of parent participants' personal accounts indicating their isolation and lack of social connection to groups or networks that could provide them with a sense of purpose and belonging (Standing, 2011).

Research shows that the most marginalised communities often have a greater concentration of families who experience complex issues such as substance abuse, mental health problems, and poverty (Vinson et al., 2015; Pawson, Hulse & Cheshire, 2015). Such factors can be cumulative, compound for individuals and communities over time, and potentially transmit from one generation to the next. Standing (2011; 2012) referred to groups afflicted by such factors as 'the precariat', living within new precarious social structures, characterised by lack of uncertainty and inequality.

As discussed in Chapter Two, social support and networks of support can help reduce stress, enable parents to learn from each other and promote effective parenting behaviours (Weiss, 2002; McConnell, Breitkreuz & Savage, 2011; Byrnes & Miller, 2012). In instances where parents perceive themselves to have accessible support, the available support from family and friends can be detrimental given the potential negative influence of some relationships (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). Parenting practices and behaviours are also influenced through relationships and can be transmitted across generations (Fraiberg et al., 1975; Singh, Narang & Contreras, 2004). This was reinforced by participants in this study:

> You know the parents have got their own issues from their childhood. The child's going to start developing those because the parents are going, 'well I can't deal with anything anymore'." (Neci, BAP participant)

> …I mean it's hard, it's hard when you're brought up one way and you know all the things that you didn't like. But sometimes it's really hard to change that behaviour. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

Michelle hints at the difficulty associated with breaking the pattern of inter-generational parenting behaviours, despite the desire to parent differently. In order for parents to change behaviours and resist the influence of intergenerational behaviour transmission, they need to have freedom of mind, which Mullainathan & Shafir (2013) argue many people who experience poverty do not have.

Further compounding the stigma some parents' experience, it is not uncommon for families experiencing poverty to fear judgement by services, lack information about available services, and not have the confidence to initiate contact with services (Carbone, Fraser, Ramburuth & Nelms, 2003). It has been found that some parents have a perception that involvement with services is accompanied by a certain stigma or sense of failure (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). The clustering effect of these factors, together with the feeling of shame, ambivalence and lack of confidence that many vulnerable parents experience (Forrester et al., 2012), exacerbates parents' isolation from services leaving them and their children at greater risk. In addition to being overwhelmed by multiple complex needs parents' may not know what supports are available to them, or face barriers in their attempt to access support (Laing, Ridley & Hunter, 2007). The complexity of parenting in disadvantaged contexts, as well as the perceptions and experiences discussed above, helps contextualize the difficulty some Australian families can face in attempting to provide optimal environments and opportunities for their children.

Given the stress experienced by many parents living in communities characterised by disadvantage, and the added complexity when combined with a history of negative stereotypes, it is understandable why some families are distrustful of or avoid contact with services (Boag-Munroe, Evangelou, 2012; Axford et al., 2012). Axford et al. (2012) contend that a family's history of negative experiences with professionals can leave them feeling bad about themselves, intimidated by professionals, and unable to communicate effectively with them.

Some participants in this study acknowledged the difficulty of their personal situations, including the complexity of intergenerational family issues, as evident in the following data:

> Life is tough and people can be nasty and critical and I think if you keep demonstrating this your children have to see and learn it. My parents didn't demonstrate this knowledge that I've got now cos they knew no better. They were in mountains of trouble with the way they lived their lives. The unhappiness that I see, very unhappy people now my parents. I don't want to live my life like that and I'm not going to. I want to be proud and happy…. I hated living in chaos. I hated getting in trouble for mums messy house. I had to stay home and do the housework. I hated that my mother forgot to bring our lunches over to the school. That didn't show love to me. I would never ever do that to my children. How could you forget them? You just wouldn't. That's not what you do… (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

> …basically I didn't want them [children]to feel the way that I felt when I was growing up and there was no way that I was going to let them grow up like that. As I said my childhood wasn't good and um that was probably one of the first things that popped into my head was, 'Nope my daughter, my kids, aren't going to grow up like that. (Michelle, Parent Facilitator) …
>
> all that happened – it was only a broken chair – but she [my mother] should have never left us all alone all the time, to go out fuckin' drinkin'… she was only lookin' out for my safety really. (Parent 5, group 2)

These excerpts highlight the many issues that can cloud or undermine a parents' ability to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for their children that include, as in these examples, parents perceptions of themselves. Participants in this study sometimes described their experiences of witnessing other parents' behaviours and routines that they perceived to be detrimental to children. The examples below were offered by participants as experiences that appeared to provide motivation for them, ensuring they provided the best possible parenting model for their own children:

> …What makes it worse is my place is just a drop-in centre for all the ferals wanderin' around after school. Better that they're with me 'cos they're not safe at their homes. When I've given 'em dinner and it's gettin' dark, I take some back to their houses and sometimes there's no-one there. So, I just take 'em back to my place with me. I mean, tell me, who would do that to their seven year old daughter? (Participant two, Group Three)
>
> Sometimes, especially here in this community, when you see the big picture you can understand why some children's behaviours are like they are, you know. Like I think that's what makes it different. When you're in the community and you see what's going on around and the way that some of the children live down here… How some parents treat their kids! I mean it blows your mind! (Michelle, Parent Facilitator)

The participants' experiences above are examples of parenting practices that would be deemed neglectful by statutory authorities. The participants' observations were related as common occurrences in their communities.

Another participant, a single parent of three children, struggling with a prolonged separation and related legal proceedings, described how the pressure of her separation compounded her isolation to the point where it impacted on her own parenting:

> …There's times I can feel it building and building and I just - there's nothing else I can do and I just go 'get out of here'… And other times I can actually feel it boil and boil and boil and I go, 'I can't stop this now'. (Neci, BAP Participant)

A parent's negativity and disinterest in the context of everyday life can detrimentally affect the child's development in subtle and deceptive ways (Coleman and Karraker, 1997). Neci had also disclosed in the same interview her perceptions of an unsupportive and sometimes hostile system of services experienced through an acrimonious relationship breakdown:

> You know my first lawyer accused me of taking money. I never touched a thing you know and then recently I tried to deal with [Children's fathers name] lawyers directly and got myself arrested for trespass. (Neci, BAP Participant)

These types of stressors described by Neci could have compounded her isolation resulting in her sense of feeling things keep "…building and building and I just - there's nothing else I can do…" (Neci, BAP Participant).

In addition to her relationship breakdown, Neci was living in a neighbourhood that was characterised by known indicators of disadvantage, including high rates of unemployment, teen pregnancy, school absences, public housing and low income households (Kids come first report, 2009).

There is evidence that the characteristics of a neighbourhood can impact (positively or negatively) on a parent's capacity to identify and implement parenting strategies (Byrnes & Miller, 2012; Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). Vinson et al. (2015) highlight the difficult situation for individuals living in the most disadvantaged postcodes in Australia given the typical concentration of multiple indicators of disadvantage in such communities. Regardless of postcode, people often turn to others in the same community for support (Ablewhite, Kendrick, Watson & Shaw, 2015; Roehlkepartain et al., 2002). As discussed in Chapter Two, parents seek parenting advice primarily from their immediate network of family and friends and supplement this advice with information from services if they are connected to them (Bornstein et al., 2010). Parents living in communities characterised by disadvantage might not have access to appropriate support due to their isolation or difficulty in identifying or accessing service support. Additional stress for some parents might be experienced through events like family loss and other stressful events. Participants' descriptions of events that clustered together in a short period, appear to demonstrate the stress and sense of them feeling overwhelmed experienced by some parents:

> I've had a hell of a lot going on the last two weeks … we told [child] about his real dad. He fell apart three days later. Then on the weekend, Pop passed away, then the kids got sick and vomiting everywhere. Got the funeral on Wednesday. I've

> cried a lot. I hope next week is frickin better! I've got a pile of washing. What made me cry was when the three year old spilt cordial on the couch. That's when I really lost it. (Participant 1, Group 3)

> When you get one thing happen you seem to get more things pulling you down. My partner's job at [factory name] is finishing. A teacher, she blamed my son of pissing on another kid …. My sister - she isn't talking to me cos she reckons I was back stabbing her… I don't know! How much more can I put up with? (Dana, BAP Participant)

Studies have shown that as the number of risk factors a child is exposed to accumulate, there is an increased possibility the child's development will be negatively affected (Trentacosta et al., 2009). The potential vulnerability of some participants and their children in this study was compounded by the stress and isolation they were experiencing in other parts of their lives.

An additional source of stress for parents can arise from encounters they have with professionals that leave them feeling stigmatised and mistrusting of services (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). Within the process of data collection in this study, during a meeting of parents and service providers, a local health professional explained her service's policy relating to initial meetings with mothers. The service's policy directed professionals to ask parents if they felt safe in their relationship with their partner. Annabelle, a participant in this study responded immediately:

> I've had five children, and that is exactly why I've never trusted professional workers – cos' you're prepared to throw all the relationship stuff out the window by asking stuff like that. Would you ever get an honest answer to a question like that from a stranger? I doubt it! (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

The conversation that followed included an exploration of the potential vulnerability of parents coping with everyday struggles, and personal examples of multiple stressors for some parents, compounded by encounters with services that may further marginalise and stigmatise parents. One participant outlined the distrust of the system that she believed was letting her and the children down:

> I don't take my children to child health nurses, I don't take my children to the doctors unless I feel there's an actual need to get a second opinion… (Neci, BAP Participant)

Another participant said that she changed the street address that she gave to services, even though she still lives at the same house so that service records did not indicate the suburb name. She explained that she experienced a significant positive change in service behaviour

towards her since the change and this resulted in being treated more fairly by the general practitioner and other professionals:

> …cos they don't know I live in [suburb name] they treat me like any other mum rather than just another parent from [suburb name]. You can really tell the difference. (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

Parent experiences like the two examples above present a challenge to professionals, and the services they represent, to question the presence of negative assumptions that may influence professionals' interactions with parents. In a framework of contemporary democratic values, and according the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCROC), all children, regardless of their personal situation, have the right to good quality health care and should not be deprived of the right to access such services (Unicef, 1989). In order for children to have such access to services, parents attempts to access services will be supported by encounters with professionals who pay attention to building trust and rapport with parents unencumbered by bias, deficit based perceptions and generalisations. Studies have shown that experiences of discrimination, reflected in professionals' deficit perceptions, do occur and can potentially undermine the parent/worker relationship (van Houte et al., 2013; Sousa & Rodrigues, 2012)

Given the compounding impact of multiple risk factors experienced by some parents, when experienced in conjunction with the deficit perceptions of parents held by some professionals (Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005), can undermine relationships with parents. This study identified an imperative for services to carefully consider the initial process of engagement, especially with families that may be suspicious of professionals or anxious about encounters with them. Building supportive, non-judgemental relationships between professionals and parents helps diffuse the stress or pressure parents can experience through fear of being judged by services, or lacking the confidence to initiate contact in the first instance (Carbone et al., 2003).

6.3 Discourses and perspectives that further subjugate and marginalize the marginalized: Barriers parents must overcome to access parent support

As highlighted in Chapter Two, the literature points to a number of reasons why parents might resist engaging with services. These include disadvantage, parental shame and ambivalence, worker attitudes and behaviour, service accessibility, distrust of services and parent confidence (Carbone et al., 2003; Forrester et al., 2012; Gladstone et al., 2014;

Koerting et al., 2013). From a critical perspective, power, that is present in all relationships, can be used either inadvertently or purposefully to both empower and to subjugate others (Freire, 2005). Brookfield (2001) warns that experiences some may find emancipatory, may in fact be experienced as repressive by others. Exploring adult learning through the lens of Foucault's post-structuralist social theory, Brookfield argues that both repression and liberation co-exist in human relationships where power is present (2001). It may be that the presence of power, be it overt or implicit, and its misuse in relationships between already marginalised parents and professionals (Gladstone et al., 2014), contributes to distrust and disengagement of some families.

The following data from the researcher's journal describes an example of discrimination experienced regularly by parents living in highly stigmatised communities:

> Sally, a parent facilitator, told me today that she has changed the address that she gives to services, even though she still lives at the same house. Her postal address no longer names the suburb where she still lives. She told me that this change means she is now treated more fairly by the GP, the paediatrician and other services she needs to see for her child who has special needs. …. [Workers name], who regularly accompanies her to specialist visits agreed. "Yeah, it's true – a big difference. Sad but true".
> (Researcher reflective journal, November 2014)

Such explicit examples of discrimination, as experienced by Sally in her encounters with professionals, can potentially undermine the parent/worker relationship (van Houte et al., 2013; Sousa & Rodrigues, 2012; Davis & Day, 2010). Deficit perspectives of parents are widely reported in health and education (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005; Lam & Kwong, 2014) and these are known to be influenced by deficit policy discourses (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). Such powerful perspectives and discourses give rise to service cultures that distrust groups of families and lead to conditions in which families, and entire subsets of communities, can become viewed as 'hard to reach' (Evangelou et al., 2013).

Families who have a history of complex needs and/or troubled encounters with services can be viewed by services as non-compliant (Fadiman, 1997; Ward-Collins, 1998). These perceptions and their accompanying behaviours can subjugate parents who assume the persona of the marginalised or the oppressed (Freire, 2005).

Marginalisation can be perpetuated by behaviours and language that have been referred to as 'othering', marking and naming those that are different from oneself (Weis, 1995).

Whilst othering practices are evident in the behaviour of both families and services, Johnson et al. (2004) point out that such practices are sometimes entangled in providers' everyday discourses. Professionals might lack awareness of the subtle expressions of discrimination that are reflected in these common behaviours and discourses. One professional participating in this study, pointed out that workers do not intentionally behave in ways that undermine the parent/worker relationship:

> I think some practitioners in highly disadvantaged communities eventually experience compassion fatigue. They start out with an open minded interest.
> But in the face of dealing with full on family and service stuff, it's tiring.
> Workers can sink back into judgment and that middle class way of thinking.
> (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Cecilia's suggested that the relentless task of remaining compassionate and open minded is very difficult when trying to support parents and children in contexts where their needs are overwhelming, whilst also practicing within service constraints and being influenced by their own personal and cultural constructions. Nonetheless, it has been found that services can create an 'idealised other' as the client who is compliant, realises what is 'important',' and 'listens' to the advice of experts (Johnson et al., 2004, p.260). Service systems are often strong in authority which can so easily be imposed on community members who continue to submit to the perceived authority of professionals (Vincent & Martin, 2002). Vincent and Martin's (2002) research focused on parents varying abilities to intervene on their children's behalf with schools. They emphasised how the voices of parents', particularly those who have access to less resources, can be silenced in such interactions, resulting in parental cynicism about the potential for them to influence change (Vincent & Martin, 2002).

If parents feel disempowered by services they may distance themselves from the system. This inevitably results in children not receiving the additional professional help they often need (Sawyer et al., 2000). Successful engagement between parents and parent support services is therefore contingent on professionals and the organisations they represent, being accessible to all parents. The analysis of data gathered in this study, considered in the context of an authoritative literature, support the developing argument advanced in this

thesis, that service accessibility for families requires services address factors that create barriers for parents who struggle to engage with the service system.

6.3.1 Sharp edges in the service system create barriers to parent/professional engagement

The data compiled in this study provides an imperative for Australian parenting education services to pay attention to the barriers some parents encounter in attempts to access the service system. Such barriers can be likened to 'sharp edges' that inhibit contact between parents and professionals. The 'sharp edges' of services are experienced by parents in a variety of different ways; through professionals deficit views of families (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005; Cottle & Alexander, 2014); professional worker behaviours (Forrester et al., 2012); stigmatising environments and inflexible service structures (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012); and, subjugating bureaucratic and professional discourses (Ney, Stolz, & Maloney, 2011). As evident in the data extracts below, parents can feel unheard and disempowered by their encounters with services:

> … This whole family law system, you know, I've been exposed to the term 'system abuse' and that's exactly what I feel like I'm in the middle of now (Neci, BP Participant)

> …actually there's another thing I'd actually like to change. Um, the welfare system. Um my partner's got three previous children and their mother isn't doing any stuff. She's not looking after them properly. But my partner's trying to get the custody because she's got a mental problem and she's not feeding them and clothing them and the welfare, the welfare seem to listen to the females rather than the males. (Dana, BAP Participant)

These data highlight the negative perceptions of some parents who have encountered adversity in their dealings with services. These examples reflect the complex nature of relationships between the system and disenfranchised parents, which can silence parents and deny them of their dignity (Sankaran & Lander, 2007). Such experiences can lead parents to a perception that "…they [services] don't really care about us" (Dana, BAP Participant).

It has been argued that the strongest predictor of family retention with services is the characteristics of the service itself (Watson, 2005). Therefore the onus is largely on the service, and how it prioritises the quality of its encounters with parents, to ensure a continued connection with parents and their children. This strengthens the idea put forward in this study that the experiences of families who have struggled to trust services

might make a unique contribution in the process of reconceptualising approaches to the design and implementation of parent support interventions.

Cojocaru and Cojocaru (2011) argue that in a parenting education context, the engagement between parents and practitioners strengthened when those people facilitating interventions are able to be flexible in their communication and responsive to the unique needs of individual parents. They also assert that in a parenting education context, addressing the asymmetry of power that can exist between parents and professionals is helped by the educator being from the same social proximity and having similar life experience (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). Katz et al., (2006) suggest that services will be more accessible to parents when they encourage and support parents to participate fully, ensuring they are given appropriate supports at key transition points, and avoid stigmatising parents. Given that the barriers to services engaging and sustaining contact with families often concern the characteristics of services, and how they are perceived by parents, it is argued in this thesis that parents can potentially perform a critical role spanning the boundaries between disengaged parents and professionals.

As previously discussed, the early intervention literature clearly outlines the effect of environment, program structure, worker attributes, ease of access, on the engagement of disengaged or high risk families (Katz et al., 2006; Evangelou et al., 2013). In addition, it is known that where families participate voluntarily in parenting groups, parent participants may be more motivated than those coerced or required to participate (Katz et al., 2006). The very notion of accessing service support presupposes that parents have the capacity to find and initiate contact with available services. However, it is argued that beyond the mental and physical effort required to provide basic needs for their children, some struggling parents may not have the available resource to be proactive for their children (Gillies, 2008).

The ‘sharp edges’ of services experienced by many parents potentially wound the parent/professional relationship. However, those things that present as ‘sharp edges’ in services, when addressed, can potentially help build relationships between parents and professionals.

6.4 Softening the sharp edges of services

It was evident in the data from this study that a contributing factor towards softening the sharp edges of services for some parents, was the facilitation of a parenting intervention by other parents. Through their active involvement as parent facilitators of an intervention, parents appeared to be able to promote the credibility of the service from the perspective of other parents. This occurred through enabling opportunities to restore or build mutually beneficial relationships between other parents and professionals through a parent led parenting intervention. The dual role of being parents living in the local community whilst also being parent facilitators, as co-workers alongside professionals, appeared to enable connections between professionals and other parents in a unique way. This point was highlighted by both of the EPEC professionals who participated in this study:

> Because parents feel connected to the parent facilitators, they have respect for them and also feel respected by them… Parents see them [parent facilitators] and they think 'if these people are prepared to work within the services, well then maybe it is safe for me too'. We can have a really skilled worker but they're never going to be the same as a parent facilitator in bridging the gap. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

> It doesn't mean there is not structure, professionalism and quality in what we do. But we can remove the barriers and formality of it all, create a culture of trust and genuineness, to make things easier for parents to relax and feel comfortable. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

Both Lidia and Cecilia demonstrated their belief that a key to engaging families in services is enabling parents to feel connected, respected and trusted through environments and interventions that feel relaxed and less formal. This data strengthens the idea that the functions and behaviours that characterize sharp edges within services are the same that can also present as the soft edges of services, enabling previous gaps between professionals and parents to be bridged.

Recent literature has called for service approaches that focus on shared learning and improved participation such as the 'gap-mending approach' proposed by Chiapparini (2016). Whilst Chiapparini's work relates to social work teaching and education, its key aim is to empower socially excluded groups to be actively and equally involved in the learning process. This concept is transferable to the situations described earlier in this chapter in which participants illustrated a void between the perspectives of professional workers and parents. Within the context of this study, the sharing of each other's perspectives and

assumptions (parents and professionals) could help both parties learn from and understand each-others contexts and constraints. Such shared learning processes could soften the sharp edges of traditional top down, expert-led provision of parent support interventions, leading to a culture of reciprocal learning between professionals and parents.

The collaborative edge softening process between professionals and parents could cultivate fertile ground through which transformations may occur for parent participants. Parent participants transformed perspectives; of professionals (as co-learners); and services (as flexible and responsive); can help reinforce positive relationships between parents and professionals. Karen reinforced this in her description of an experience with a professional she was working alongside as a parent facilitator:

> I sent a message saying it's not going to work, I'm not going to be able to make it to the Council Chambers and I said "do you want to come here?" She was like "sure, that works" She was even interested in seeing my house. It's special! (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

The professional's flexibility, and obvious positive regard for Karen, left an impression and clearly demonstrated behaviours that provided an edge softening effect. The professional's preparedness to visit Karen in her home could challenge previous constructs about professionals held by parents like Karen. Not unlike the professional's flexibility experienced by Karen, parent facilitators' presence in services, working alongside professionals, was viewed by professionals as helping to improve conditions and enabling participation between parents by making services more real and approachable:

> Parents who might not want to visit 'a service' will come to BAP because it's run by other parents… when they get here they say 'oh, ok, I don't get treated like a number. I can come right in, get comfy, see other people like me, and know that the facilitators are just more people like me. I can do this.' (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

> If you are burnt by services, then you are going to be vigilant. BAP participants see parent facilitators as an in between camp. They have a foot in both camps. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

As described in these extracts, both professionals who participated in this study viewed the parent facilitators as playing a "boundary spanning" (Korschun, 2015; Aldrich & Herker, 1977) role between the service system and families 'burnt by services'. Aldrich and Herker's study (1977) was concerned with individuals who by virtue of their positions perform a boundary role with external groups, enabling the organisation to understand and

respond to valuable external information. One example they offer is the role of a company CEO. Aldrich and Herker argue that boundary spanners are the critical link between environmental characteristics and organizational structure and maintain the credibility of the organisation/service through providing specifically tailored messages and information.

The presence of the parent facilitators' boundary spanning role, working within services, can 'round off' or 'soften' the sharp edges of the service system enabling new types of encounters with professionals, and the rebuilding of trusting relationships with other parents:

> With the other parenting course, people here in [community name] drop out quickly. There is a huge difference between an outsider, coming in to deliver a course and someone who is local, a parent, less formal, who relates to the parents. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

Lidia's description of the difference between 'an outsider coming in to deliver' and a parent doing the same implies that the parent deliverer, is supported by her and other professionals. With both the professionals and parent facilitators working together in partnership and viewing each other as co-workers, their relationship may be more sustainable and reciprocally beneficial. This working partnership offers a unique perspective of parent/professional relationships given parents traditional perception of professionals in services is that they have more power and decision making authority than themselves (Davis & Day, 2010). Karen, a parent facilitator who had spent time working alongside professionals described her perception of the professionals she worked with:

> … I see them as separate, higher up. Maybe it's a bit of my own insecurity not ever being up to that level. I still see them as separate. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

Despite her experience facilitating the peer-led intervention over an eighteen month period, Karen's continued perception of professionals being higher up, and on a different level, offers some insight into the change required to enable a working relationship with parents reflective of a reciprocally beneficial partnership. One participant captured the essence of the working relationship between parent facilitators and parent participants in describing her perception of the difference between the peer-led parenting intervention and other approaches:

> What we are doing here is engaging parents with and through other parents, not doing things to and for them." (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator, 2014).

As a parent facilitator Annabelle's succinct statement goes directly to what are considered the key elements of effective parenting/early intervention programs. In particular, these include: relationships and authentic partnerships with families, and non-stigmatizing environments and modes of delivery (Moore & McDonald, 2013; Davis & Day, 2010; Winkworth et al., 2010). Annabelle's assertion appears to go further identifying herself as the vehicle through which boundary-spanning (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) between the parent and service communities could occur. Her statement suggests a perspective that engagement with other parent occurs with and through people like herself. As a parent working with other parents through the peer-led intervention, Annabelle's new perspective of the system enabled her to experience the potential for a reciprocally beneficial, co-producing partnership between herself and professionals. Annabelle's description of working with and through parents gestures towards the possibility of relational agency (Edwards, 2005) being present in the work between professionals and parents in their common goal of engaging other parents. This new insight into the active partnership between parent facilitators and professionals may play an important role in addressing barriers that inhibit helpful relationships between services and families who have traditionally struggled to access services.

6.5 Working with and through each other

As discussed in Chapter Two relational agency (Edwards, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2011), a theoretical concept that expands the idea of collaborative practitioner and service approaches, is a useful way of conceptualising and explaining the data from this study.

Relational agency refers to the alignment of thoughts and actions between practitioners in working towards a shared goal (Edwards, 2005). Practitioners from different disciplines can be seen to exercise relational agency when interpreting problems around a shared client, aligning their expertise and experience with each other in order to reach a shared outcome. Their separate but joint work intersects through common knowledge and is enhanced by 'what matters' from the perspective of each contributing party (Nuttall, 2013). The emerging concept of relational agency offers a potential framework for reconceptualising ways in which parent facilitators, in this study, can complement the expertise and knowledge of practitioners. The unique relationship between parent facilitators and professional workers, in the provision of a peer-led intervention provides a new context through which to consider relational agency.

An application of relational agency is discernible in the interaction between the professional and the parent facilitator in their shared goal of supporting parents' learning and skill development. Both the professional and the parent facilitators make equally valuable contributions:

> She [parent facilitator] doesn't do things how I would and that's ok. She brings something I can't and vice versa. Together our experience and skills work well. I respect [parent facilitator name] for what she brings to our work together and I know she respects my experience and what I bring. More importantly, I can just see the difference our relationship makes for the parents we work with in the BAP course. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

Lidia pointed out that the professional brings a distinctly different, but no more valuable, body of expertise to the task, focused on the care and well-being of parent facilitators and participants. At the same time the parent facilitator brought her own relevant expertise with intimate knowledge of the lived experience of parents living in and committed to the community. Hence their complementary knowledge and experience is exercised as distributed expertise (Edwards, 2007) across the dyad and "…woven together to provide consistent support focused on a broad understanding of social inclusion" (Edwards, 2005, p. 180). Whilst both parties performed independent functions their common goal could not be fully achieved without either party exercising their unique function in concert with the other. A parent facilitator Karen, described the learning dynamic between herself and the professional who supervised the EPEC program:

> We [workers and parents] can bounce off each other all these great ideas. That's what we do when we're empowered and we get excited about our parenting…I've never worked with people who give good feedback, that tell you you're doin' a great job. … The network is pretty nice, pretty special. You actually feel like you're really important. (Karen, parent facilitator)

As 'partners in practice' (Daley et al., 2008), both Karen and the professional came to align their responses with the knowledge and experience resources held by the others that they work with (Edwards 2005). In doing so, they would build and use common knowledge as a component of what Edwards calls 'relational expertise' (2011) necessary in working on complex tasks across disciplines and boundaries. Edwards, (2007) points out that this form of working together, across professional boundaries, can meet with resistance resulting from institutional boundary erosion and loss of power. Within the context of this study such tension between stakeholders is not evident. To the contrary, if any form erosion of boundaries is evident in this study it can be seen in the dismantling of traditional

hierarchical structures and behaviours between parents and expert practitioners through their work alongside each other in the delivery of a peer-led parenting intervention. This resulted in parents playing more active roles in the service system.

Data from this study illustrates relational agency (Edwards, 2005) as more than a dynamic between two experts. It is evidenced in the dynamic learning relationships between professionals, parent facilitators, and parent participants of the peer-led parenting intervention:

> I don't know if I've had many friends that I've had on the level that I am with some of these people [EPEC supervisor and co-facilitators]. Not living in each-others pockets, but it is on a different level. Being open to learning together. (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

Common factors that emerged from data analysis and outlined in Chapter Four, highlighted the transformative potential for parents when supported by reflective learning relationships between parents and service providers. Data from all groups of participants reinforced the benefits for parent participants of participating in ongoing reflective learning interactions with others.

Wenger (2000) identified three modes of identification within social learning systems. They are engagement, alignment and imagination. Engagement occurs in the shared task of being, acting and producing together. Alignment is concerned with ensuring that the product of the shared interest is aligned with other processes to support sustained interest and effect. Thirdly, imagination refers to the process of positioning ourselves and making sense of our unique situation in order to consider what might be possible. The concept of parents and professionals working together in the delivery of a reflective parent led parenting intervention appears to provide a unique social learning setting in which Wenger's three modes of identification may be exercised. The nature of the learning community that emerged, in this research between parents, parent facilitators and professionals, enabled parents to learn in a natural and informal way from each other (McConnell, Breitkreuz & Savage, 2011). This study demonstrates how shared learning experience between parents and professionals appeared to enhance engagement between parents and services in communities characterised by disadvantage.

The co-learning relationship between parents and professionals, identified in this study, provides the foundation for both groups working together in dismantling the sharp edges

make services inaccessible to some families. Such a collaboration may have a profound impact for all involved if it were the result of collective and collaborative change across services and with the broader community (Kania & Kramer, 2011) rather than siloed within the boundaries of an individual program or service. This type of authentic co-production of parent support interventions calls for a radically different type of relational partnership between the 'consumer' and parenting support service than what has been traditionally evident in parent/professional relationships. This concept will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

6.6 Summary

The data presented in this chapter and the associated analysis in the context of other literature, demonstrates the complexity of day to day life of many families. Data from this study provides a rare insight into the multiple issues that intersect to compound disadvantage for families experiencing periods of vulnerability. The cumulative effect of these issues not only impacts the children involved but can also hinder the quality of engagement between parents and services that specialise in family support.

Despite the possible benefits for parents and their children in accessing parent support services during times of vulnerability, some families either find services too difficult to access or choose not to engage with the system. This chapter has highlighted the importance of services understanding and responding to the environmental, behavioural and structural barriers to engaging parents, particularly those parents who may be suspicious of professionals, or resistant to forming relationships with services. It has been proposed that services can work to restore relationships with parents by addressing the sharp edged service barriers that prevent parents from accessing the system. This can be achieved through; the more informal approach of parents working as co-workers in services; the boundary spaning roles that parents can perform between services and other parents; and, addressing traditional hierarchical constructs of power and authority that are known to exist in some practice frameworks and service models.

The data discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six supports the idea that changes to traditional approaches to parenting education could help model, support and embed a practice of shared reflection and learning between parents and practitioners involved in facilitating parenting programs. The following chapter examines changes in practices across

a service system that can help to authentically engage parents experiencing multiple and complex needs. It presents a case for the co-production of shared practices between parents and professionals that promote new ways of them being together as partners in practice. The characteristics of a reflective learning culture of practice between professionals and parents will be further elaborated in the next chapter as a distinguishing characteristic of a reconceptualised model of practice in a parenting support service context; one that addresses traditional imbalances to ensure sustained relationships with families who have traditionally found services difficult to access.

Chapter Seven: Towards reconceptualising practices within a service system

> THERE is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. The innovator has the enmity of all who profit by the preservation of the old system and only lukewarm defenders by those who would gain by the new system. (Machiavelli 1513, as cited by Carrier, 2010, p. 201)

7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, key themes that emerged from the data were introduced and discussed. These are all related to the central theme of transformation. In the context of this study, transformation had been experienced by participants through reflective learning enabled by social interactions, individual practice, and through reciprocal learning interactions between parents and professional workers. It was argued that transformations occurred for parents as a result of their experiences of learning alongside other parents, experiencing feelings of increased parenting confidence, adopting reflective practices, and developing new perspectives about themselves, their children and their personal situations. Data from this study has provided evidence of the development of trusting relationships between parents and professionals that contributed to transformations for parents. This chapter builds on the earlier discussion addressing the characteristics of a culture of shared reflection and learning that is evident between parents and professionals in a parent support service context.

This chapter provides a framework for the translation of knowledge developed through this study and its implications for practice. The theme of transformational change continues to be explored. Emerging from the data in this study is a model of shared practice between parents and professionals. This provides a foundation from which parents could perform a pivotal role in reconceptualising practices and co-delivering parent support interventions in communities where families commonly experience adversity. The resulting model of practice illustrates the interplay of various concepts that help make the changed practices, revealed in this study, effective. These various concepts include communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998), reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and relational agency (Edwards, 2005). Working together, they provide the potential for a renegotiated

framework of partnership between parents and professionals. Through the interplay of these concepts traditional service constructions of parenting support are challenged. The data presented in this chapter examined alongside the above mentioned concepts help illuminate a shared model of practice that facilitates respectful engaging relationships between professionals and parents. Such a model is characterised by the co-design and co-delivery of a renegotiated practice, with parents as decision-making partners in the process and results in improved service accessibility for parents.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the socio-political influences on the provision of parent support services and how these help determine what is offered by services and frame support for parents experiencing adversity. It builds on the evidence and analysis provided in Chapters Five and Chapter Six. It presents a detailed description of a potential model of partnership, between professionals and parents, which can ultimately provide the conditions for the co-production of parenting support practices enabling services to be more relatable to families experiencing adversity. In addition the characteristics of a service environment and culture that can provide the climate for professionals to partner with parents in the provision of parent support interventions, are examined.

7.2 Conceptualising the notion of 'service' in parent support interventions

Relationship development between organisations, service providers and community members can be influenced by the socio-political climate. This influence can help or hinder the way services are provided for families. Bauman (2005) proposes the concept of 'liquid modernity' to explain how structures of power and authority are being compromised and deregulated through increased individualisation and the domination of neo-liberal economics on policy framing and subsequent practice. He argues the impact of this is the dilution of the capacity for long term thinking and planning into inconsistent, separate, short-term projects (Bauman, 2005).

Reflecting on liquid-modern life and its influence on approaches to education, Zipin, Sellar and Hattam (2012) argue for organisations to serve the task of the "…reimagining of social worlds in diverse lived spaces" (p. 189). Zipin et al. go on to posit that the inhabitants of the diverse lived spaces have the necessary experience and capacities for the imaginative reworking that can result in the realisation of new possibilities (2012). They contend that when stakeholders whose lives are influenced by liquid modern contexts, are enabled to

exercise their own agency, this can result in the construction of new personal futures and possibilities from the experiences of their own lived realities. (Zipin, Sellar & Hattam, 2012). Chapter Five presented data that illustrated such change occurring through parents constructing new perspectives, and assuming greater control in their lives, enabled by new knowledge and experiences. The findings from this study also show that this type of transformative change for parents is better supported when engaging relationships occur between community members and professionals. These conditions enable parents to imagine and act on new possibilities.

In the context of considering support for families, the processes that focus on enabling parents to assume increased responsibility and build individual capacity are often referred to as 'empowerment' As a concept, 'empowerment' is frequently employed within the context or debate about new models' of service provision. It has been defined as "…the process by which relatively powerless people work together to increase control over events that determine their lives and health." (Laverack, 2006, 'Introduction' section). Others have viewed empowerment more broadly as "… the process of gaining influence over events and outcomes of importance" (Fawcett, White et al., 1995, p.677).

The liberal use of the term 'empowerment' by governments and organisations to describe outcomes for program recipients is problematic. Notwithstanding the value of empowerment as an ideal, the literature highlights evidence of its simplicity, misuse and dilution of what was a powerful concept in education, health and social work (Pease, 2002; Woodall, Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2012; Vincent 1996).

It has been argued that within an educational context, empowerment provides only a simplistic view of social justice, implying the relinquishing of some power by the powerful to those who are less powerful (Vincent, 1996). Vincent proposed that empowerment should be considered as a precursor to supporting collective action and participation towards change by those who have less resource and decision making power (1996). Rather than empowerment being an endpoint, Vincent's argument reconceptualises empowerment as an enabling starting point for change. This was reinforced by the eminent critical theorist, Paulo Freire in his assertion that it is not suffice to simply empower the individual but one must first address the systems that reinforce suffering (2005). This

serves as a powerful reminder of the shortcomings of present-day policy that informs and guides expert laden human service interventions.

Empowerment is not an outcome of parents' involvement in a peer-led intervention. Rather parents must experience increased control over structures and events that influence their lives before they can begin to recognise possibilities for change. An examination of service characteristics that help enable individuals to experience empowerment is warranted in order to avoid parent empowerment being something that is only perceived by professionals rather than personally experienced by parents. Such an examination will focus on families who experience significant complex needs. It is known that families experiencing significant disadvantage are often those feeling stigmatised, powerless, that have the least resources to advocate on their own behalf, and are living in communities with low levels of relational well-being (Bess & Doykos, 2014; Forrester et al., 2012; Vandenbroeck & Geens, 2010). The cumulative effect of these risk factors on families necessitates that such parents are engaged as contributors in the design of service supports ensuring interventions are relevant and sensitive to families' needs.

7.3 Trust and humility: Attributes that help facilitate shared practices between parents and professionals

The significance of trusting relationships between service providers and parents is a key concept that has emerged consistently in the parent support literature (Stoner et al., 2005; Davis & Day, 2010; Lam & Kwong, 2014). As previously discussed, the corporate world has also become concerned with the notion of consumer trust and respectful ways to approach 'trust repair' (Bozic, 2017).

Data from this study highlighted how trust between parent support services and parents arose from the normal, casual, relaxed interactions that transpired through the course of the intervention. The following excerpts, from parent participants demonstrate this:

> It was really interesting to listen to their [parent facilitators] family situations as well, you know cos they could bring what their experiences were to it as well. …and they were just normal everyday average Joe's, you know. (Aileen, BAP participant)
>
> They were just … parents themselves you know… You don't feel like you're going into like a classroom atmosphere, it was just like really relaxing. I felt at home. (Angela, BAP Participant)

> …they [parent facilitators] can relate, relate their stories back, and they're a bit more real and down to earth. Yes that's right and you know they've got all the same things going on at home that I have… (Dana, BAP participant)

These data illuminate participants' personal perceptions of the relaxed and casual approaches of the parent facilitators and help contextualise the attributes of facilitators that enable parent participants to personally identify with and trust them. The participants recognised and approved of the less formal approach by the parent facilitators noting the 'realness' (Rogers 1962) in the casual attire, the resonance in personal parenting experience, and their preparedness to disclose personal experiences as described below:

> Because they were just the same as us. They walked in in jeans and casual clothes, they were just, you know, they introduced themselves and 'this is my kids and this is that,' and their kids aren't perfect either and they were the whole way through our course they were sharing with us …when everyone's sitting around talking like that you sort of everyone's got a different issue and you can all sort of sit together and you know… (Angela, BAP Participant)

> Yeah they were right into it. They did um, they joined in with all of the activities that we did, you know, they took part and everything like that and they had like icebreakers at the start you know to sort of um, get everybody to sort of be at ease like straight away, rather than just go in and go, 'Right we're here to do this blah blah blah blah today,' …And um you know you don't feel like you're going into like a classroom atmosphere, it was just like really relaxing. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

Angela and Aileen's descriptions of the casualness and ease of the parent facilitators suggests an affinity between themselves and the facilitators of the intervention. As deliverers of the peer-led parenting intervention, and active workers within the system, the parent facilitators may have helped the parent support program be more accessible to some families. The use of a trusted third party in the process of 'trust repair' is known to be an effective organizational strategy for restoring the trust of consumers in experiencing tangible reparatory evidence (Bozic, 2017). The concept of trust repair is reflected in this study through the contribution of parent facilitators delivering a parenting intervention. The common focus of parenting between participants and parent facilitators appeared to make things 'more real' for parents. Personal accounts and first-hand experience of parenting, by a trusted local parent, who was facilitating the course, appeared to help participants relate to the facilitators:

> I mean they [parent facilitators] can relate, relate their stories back, and they're a bit more real and down to earth (Dana, BAP Participant)

> I couldn't believe that my stories of what I do when I'm feeling frustrated or angry were any use to other parents – but they were. You know, lots of other mums experience the same feelings and we were able to see that this is just

> normal. I'm no freak and I'm not weak. I'm me and there's others just like me. (Angela, BAP Participant)

In the context of the provision of parent support interventions, it is evident that professionals who work within the service system, including service professionals and their administrators, could support the restoration of trust by identifying and implementing measures that begin a process of authentic engagement with families who have found services difficult to access. The findings of this study help solidify this argument and lead to proposing a model of partnership between parents and professionals which promote the co-production of agreed behaviours, actions and processes that enable sustainable and trusting engagement with families experiencing disadvantage. The model of co-producing partnership incorporates the concepts of partnership with parents (Davis & Day, 2010), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998), reflective practice (Schon, 1983), and relational agency (Edwards, 2005). These have been discussed in previous chapters as concepts evident and useful in the analysis of data that helped bring parents and professionals together in partnerships characterised by shared learning and transformed practice. As discussed in Chapter Two, it has been argued that the concept of partnership is problematic given ambiguity in how it has been understood, conceptualised and enacted (Alexander, 2009; Pinkus, 2003). However, this study provides evidence for authentic partnership between parents and professionals in a parent support context.

Davis and Day (2010) assert that humility is a key practitioner attribute necessary for working in partnership with parents. Humility reflects a realistic awareness of personal limitations including a flexibility and preparedness to learn. In fact, it is suggested that people are most authentic when they are humble (Saunders, 2016). As Rowatt et al., state, "The etymological roots of humility were traced to the Latin terms humilis (i.e., lowly, humble, or literally ''on the ground'') and humus (i.e., earth)" (2006, p. 198). Often linked to the concept of modesty and an absence of self-serving behaviour (Rowatt et al., 2006), humility has been defined as "the quality of being humble; modest sense of one's own significance" (Macquarie Dictionary, 2017).

The term humility has also been used in the area of multicultural medical education. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, (1998) proposed the need for what they termed 'cultural humility', recognizing a need to redress the power imbalance in medical practitioner/patient relationships. Cultural humility incorporates a lifelong commitment to

self-evaluation and critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the physician-patient dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 117). They argued that the increasing multicultural landscape in the USA demanded medical practitioners be trained to work with more diverse populations given the many forms of discrimination experienced by multicultural groups. This argument acknowledges the important interaction between expert knowledge and ongoing learning through self-reflection and values reciprocal learning that occurs between the traditional consumer and professional. If practitioners are reflective about the experiences of others this helps them to be attuned to the diverse, dynamic and complex nature of the world outside of, and beyond, their own experience (Ortega & Coulborn Faller, 2011).

Building on Tervalon and Murray-Garcia's concept of 'cultural humility' (1998), integrated with the evidence assembled through this study, a strong case for a reconceptualised practice within the service system is established and forms a focal point for the discussion that follows in this chapter. The quality of humility is a defining attribute of the partnership between professionals and parents described in this thesis. Humility is identified in this study as a quality, which enables workers in parent support services be more relatable to parents, particularly for those parents who have struggled to engage with services. As illustrated earlier in this thesis, relationships that include shared reflection and learning can be sufficiently robust to manage challenges that arise in change processes and appear to support parents and professionals to transform their own perspectives and practices.

7.4 Integrating humility in practice with parents

The parent/professional partnership described in this thesis emerges as a counteraction to traditional top down expert modes of service delivery that primarily focus on responding to presenting problems (Sousa & Rodrigues, 2012). The behaviours, actions and interpersonal interactions that are central to this model of partnership, mirror the 'sayings doings and relatings' that Kemmis argues "compose practices" (2009, p. 466). In a new body of work and theory development Kemmis et al., (2013) refer to the 'practice architectures' that influence individual and collective participation in practice. They argue that these architectures both shape and constrain practices (2013). Over time, the practices, the practitioners, and conditions of practice, can be transformed (Kemmis, 2009). Likewise, the interactions between parents and professionals' within a co-producing partnership, as

evidenced in this study, could help further inform the concept of 'practice architectures' (Kemmis et al., 2013). As evidenced in this study, practice architectures that influenced interactions between parents and professionals, resulted in new ways of engaging and supporting families living in communities characterised by disadvantage.

A set of characteristics found within service practices that are central components of a co-producing partnership with parents are outlined below. These characteristics are a distillation of key themes emerging from the data. As previously discussed in relation to parental learning and transformation, this evolution occurred when they were engaged as participants and facilitators in a peer-led parenting intervention.

The characteristics are;

Genuine engagement and relationship development. Discussed in detail through Chapter Five and Chapter Six, the engagement between parent support services and families who have been resistant of services requires new ways of professionals and parents working with and through each other. This study has provided evidence of the potential for increased engagement of families through the diversification of parents' roles within, and contributions to, the delivery of parent support services.

Reflective learning as a shared practice. The potential transformative effect for parents in participating in a reflective parent support intervention, facilitated by other parents like themselves, was explored in Chapter Five. Through this experience, participants discovered opportunities for change in relation to their parenting, their children and their own personal situations.

Parents and professionals: Co-learners, co-facilitators, co-workers. Parents and professionals learning to work together in the provision of a parenting education intervention potentially challenge traditional service approaches to parent support. Their shared work helped co-construct mutually beneficial ways of being together and learning from each other.

Processes, behaviours and environments that facilitate co-producing partnerships. The previous components provide the foundation for parents and professionals to enter into a new type of relationship. This can result in the co-production of shared practices and environments that improve the accessibility of services, particularly for families who have

experienced difficulty in accessing parent support interventions. These components of a co-producing partnership with parents will be discussed in the following subsections.

7.4.1 Genuine engagement and relationship development

As discussed in Chapter Six, many services in Australia experience difficulty in engaging families who are distrustful of services. Engaging and working successfully with some families may require services to address intergenerational issues of suspicion or mistrust that can impact on how families engage with services (Boag-Munroe, Evangelou, 2012; Attride-Stirling et al., 2001). In addition, historical deficit constructions about parents, held by some services, and evident in political discourses (Millei & Lee, 2007; Lam & Kwong, 2014; Murray, 2004), will require redress. The notion of service accessibility for families particularly in communities characterised by disadvantage, has been developed through this thesis. It has been argued that genuine engagement with families requires personnel within services that have the necessary skills and qualities to instigate and nurture relationships with parents.

Historical and embedded behaviours, structures and constructions about 'families' and 'service provision' put professionals in a powerful position in their relationships with parents (Lam & Kwong, 2014). These are evident in service practices that view parents as needing to be taught, or the worker as the 'expert' with sole responsibility of being prescriber of solutions to a parent's problem. Interactions between professionals and parents often occur in service environments which some parents perceive to be unfamiliar and unfriendly (Chenhall et al., 2011). Further hindering the potential positive outcomes of joint work between some parents and professionals is what Pinkus (2005) referred to as a quagmire of shifting influences, power and priorities, with parents feeling like they were engaging with a system in which they had no influence or avenues of engagement.

The proposed co-producing partnership, outlined in this chapter, articulates the importance of shared understanding and a shared culture of practice among professionals to support engagement with parents who may be service resistant. The concept of dialogic engagement was discussed in Chapter Two as a practice that moves beyond transmitting information between people, through dialogue, to a way of being with; reflecting with; taking time with; and making new meaning with others (Talbot et al., 2017). It has been further argued that purposeful dialogic practice requires contextually specific environments, with parties in the

same temporal space that lead to dialogical moments (Owen & Westoby, 2012). It is through this type of dialogic practice that professionals in partnership with parents might begin to experience transformed perspectives. Examples of transformed perspectives in the data from this study include changes in how parents and professionals viewed each other, acknowledgement and recognition of each-others experience and expertise, and an understanding of possibilities for transforming working relationships between parents and parent support services. Vandenbroek et al. (2009) caution that such dialogic practices with parents, are difficult to maintain in socio-political contexts that are deficit focused and prescribe coercive service practices for those families deemed to be failing. Despite this, they proffer a strong argument for the creation of dialogic spaces for engagement with parents. However, Vandenbroek et al. (2009) contend that their quantitative study lacks the powerful narrative of the lived experiences of parents in their attempts to engage with a sometimes deficit focused system of support services.

Another concept called 'intergroup dialogue' also recognises the complexity relational processes where the power can be inhibitive. Intergroup dialogue aims to bring together people to build relationships across cultural and power differences to raise consciousness of inequalities and promote social justice (Nagda & Gurin, 2007). In a critical analysis of intergroup dialogue, Nagda and Gurin (2007) assert that dialogue is an open-ended process that should allow participants to acquire new or different ways of thinking and working together effectively on collaborative projects.

This study has provided strong evidence for the creation of 'dialogic moments' (Owen et al., 2012) and the making of new meaning (Talbot et al., 2017) between professionals and parents towards the co-production of practices that result in parents engaging with parenting interventions. The concept of dialogic engagement has rich potential for providing a framework for changed relations between parents and those involved in the delivery of parenting support services. Indeed, the model of co-producing partnership proposed in this chapter, may strengthen the concept of dialogic engagement by describing environments, behaviours and processes that help facilitate dialogic engagement. This study describes a form of relational practice that supports parent engagement through opening up spaces for purposeful dialogic engagement with parents. This can result in opportunities for parents and professionals to become co-producers of not only new ways of being together but also for working towards the reconceptualisation of new practices

with the service system. A reoccurring example that emerged from the data was the significant role parents are able to perform in helping soften 'sharp edges' of services experienced by some families. A professional participating in this study described the effect of parent facilitators working within services:

> They can be the person in between them [parents] and the workers. They validate the parents, show them respect, hear and validate the parents. They soften how some parents see the service a bit. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Whilst some professionals might adopt collaborative partnership practices with parents working alongside them in a parent support context, the adoption of such practices may be more difficult for other practitioners. An excerpt from the researcher's reflective journal below records the distinctive practice between parents and professionals in the Child and Family Centre environments and how different it could appear to others from outside of that context:

> I now realize what is illustrated so strongly throughout the data is the shared culture of practice between parents and workers. It can even look odd or different to the new comer (visiting professional from another service or newly appointed worker). It is uniquely local. A new community of practice emerges where members of that community (workers and parents together) have negotiated a new practice framework, a common understanding, an agreement for working together etc. It appears to take time for outsiders to understand how it differs from the typical parent/worker relationship. This challenges conventional practice in that power is renegotiated and reconfigured by the community as something that is acknowledged and shared. (Researcher Reflective Journal, November 2015)

The partnerships observed in this study where parents were employed within a parent support service, facilitating a parenting intervention, could appear somewhat different from traditional constructions of parent/professional relationships. This partnership emerged as a defining characteristic of the parent support environment in which the study was undertaken. Parent participants regularly commented on their reaction to finding other parents performing roles traditionally undertaken by professionals as having a relaxing effect:

> They [parent facilitators] were both so easy going and relaxed. It was just that they'd been through the course. It was just the fact that they were just parents, I think… these two facilitators you had were mums themselves. They had been through it all, they've had the experience themselves … oh one of them, she was pregnant, she had young ones as well. (Angela, BAP Participant)

Angela, and other participants, pointed to the practical everyday experiences of the parent facilitators. Like Angela's observation, if parents begin to view the provision of parent support as easy going and relaxed, rather than anxiety provoking or stigmatising, this may support the development of trust and respect between parents and the professionals working alongside the parent facilitators.

In a study focusing on collaboration between professionals and families deemed to be vulnerable, Sousa and Rodrigues (2012) argued that changing an individuals' beliefs about services, and building a mutually beneficial relationship with parents requires professional behaviours that build trust. This thesis further argues that such collaborative efforts should be reflected through the behaviours of all those working across the parent support sector, regardless of whether those individual practitioners were responsible for events that result in relationship difficulties with individual families. A professional who participated in this study motioned towards the variety of ways workers responded to more engaging, collaborative ways of working with parents:

> Some workers … you can just see they love this way of working. It's like they've found a way of working that really suits what they want to do. It just looks so right. For others, it is a big challenge! Even a too big a leap. (Cecilia, Supervisor)

Cecilia's description of how she viewed professionals to be working with parents in Child and Family Centre environments, in which the parenting intervention occurred, suggests that some professionals find democratic relationships with parents challenging whilst others found it complementary to their framework of practice.

Like the professional workers, some parent participants also experienced transformed perspectives of parent support services through involvement in the peer-led intervention. An example from the data in this study was the dramatic change in perspective of a parent participant from prior to participating in the intervention and then following her experience in the parent led intervention:

> I don't really agree with [service A]. They're, sort of helpful but I didn't agree with half the stuff they say and she's not real nice….it's not in every case, but in some cases, like my husband's case, he's really worried about it. He's ringing the nurses and they don't seem to want to help him. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

Following her participation in the peer-led intervention this same parent described the difference of her recent interactions with parent facilitators working within the same service system:

> …they can relate, relate their stories back, and they're a bit more real and down to earth. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

Dianna's recent positive experience of the parent facilitators may have helped shift her previous deficit perspective of services. Through these types of encounters with parents as workers in the system, parents like Dianna could begin to approach services from a new transformed perspective and begin to strengthen relationships with professionals through the 'more real and down to earth' model of parent facilitators. Through their working partnership with professionals, the parent facilitators performed an effective and locally credible 'boundary-spanning' (Korschun, 2015; Aldrich and Herker, 1977) role. As discussed in Chapter Six, parent facilitators in this study were the personnel who spanned the boundaries between parent support services and other parents. Both professionals who participated in this study pointed out that parent facilitators could be the safe person providing a bridge between workers and parents:

> We can have a really skilled worker but they're never going to be the same as a parent facilitator in bridging the gap. (Lidia, Supervisor)
>
> When they've done a lot of courses, a shift can occur. You have to keep working with the parent facilitators to help them remain a bit humble … In the first few courses, parents see the parent facilitators as a little bit more powerful – who they feel safe with. Parent facilitators can be their safe person. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

In the data excerpt above, Cecilia emphasised the credibility of the local parent facilitators and how this credibility helped facilitate safety and soften how other families may view professionals. Through exercising their boundary-spanning role, the parent facilitators were able to convey and model for parent participants a relaxed and comfortable approach to being with and working alongside parent support professionals. Through their boundary spanning role, parent facilitators also built networks of relationships between people who were interacting across traditional hierarchical gradients. In so doing they contributed to what Szreter and Woolcock (2004) called 'linking social capital' previously discussed in Chapter Two. A parent facilitator described one such example in facilitating a course for parents who were experiencing statutory interventions:

> The group I just facilitated, they all wanted to stay in contact. It was nice to feel they felt that way because I think there were a lot of child protection issues. So they were wary of us [parent facilitators] and we were wary given the group we were going in to. But, we were all kind of wrong because they were such a rewarding group to work with. People I wouldn't deal with on a day to day basis… They did settle in and it got very comfortable (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

Through the content of the peer-led intervention, Rachel and her co-facilitator were able to work in a way that helped parents involved with child protection feel comfortable in the service setting in which the intervention took place.

The joint work of parent facilitators like Rachel, alongside professionals within parent support services, appeared to reflect an implicitly shared goal of engaging parents who otherwise may not have accessed services. This resonates with the concept of relational agency (Edwards, 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2011) discussed in previous chapters. Relational agency has mostly been used in relation to a dynamic at work between professionals and only limited consideration to how it might be present between professionals and traditional consumers of services (Edwards, 2007a). Conceptualising relational agency within the context of co-producing partnerships, evident between parents and professionals illustrated in this study, might contribute to a re-conceptualisation of relationships in family support and parenting programs. The expertise a parent facilitator brings to their shared work with a professional is based around their lived experience, and local identity. This body of expertise is no less influential than that of the skilled professionals, in engaging other parents in parenting services and interventions.

Edwards (2007b) emphasises the importance of reciprocity being present in the alignment of individuals working towards a common purpose. She proposes that within this joint relational work, those involved use the resources available to them, their ways of thinking and concepts used in their social worlds, to transform previous meanings, and understandings. This occurs through enabling concepts and ways of thinking to be contested and expanding previous interpretations (Edwards, 2007b). The contribution of the active parent facilitator within a parenting support service is an illustration of the expansion of previous interpretations. The reciprocity between parent facilitators and professionals, strengthened by the local lived experience and credibility of the parent facilitator, helps enable improved accessibility of the parenting support service. The evolution of a culture of shared reflection and participation in a social learning community

between parents and professionals are examples of the potentially rich and transformational new interpretations that can arise out of the diverse resources and perspectives exchanged in the model of co-producing partnership. Complementary expertise was acknowledged and mobilized between parent facilitators and professionals to jointly achieve shared goals in the provision of a parent support intervention. Karen described the collegial nature of her relationship with professionals as 'how things should be':

> I've never worked with people who give good feedback, that tell you you're doin a great job. I've never done that. It's just been an overall a really good feeling. A feel good moment. It's just been really wonderful…… The network is pretty nice, pretty special. You actually feel like you're really important… it wraps up a wonderful example of how things should be. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

The data from this study provides evidence for how professionals and parents can construct and practice new ways of working and learning together. This was described by a professionals participating in the study:

> It's a mentor type relationship between me and the parent facilitators. Yes, a stronger connection with the parent facilitators that would be across a whole lot of things. Firstly, developing their skills in relation to facilitating the course. And I learn too! ...In supervising parent facilitators, and really reflecting on things with them, I come to realise things about, um, yes, about myself. That is not always comfortable. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Cecilia's observation reflects Edwards concept of 'relational expertise' (2011), discussed earlier in this thesis. Through working together, sharing and reflecting on practices experiences, both Cecilia and parent facilitators would come too build a common body of knowledge to help them continue working together across the boundaries that can emerge between services and parents.

In the above quote Cecilia also illustrated the quality of humility necessary for professionals in learning things about herself through her shared practice with parents. Cecilia was able to identify her role as a member of a team of parents and professionals learning together. The collaborative practice between parent facilitators and professionals was on show to other parents participating in the peer-led intervention. It modelled for them an example of informal, respectful and reciprocal learning between workers and parents. Individuals who may have traditionally been separated by an implicit hierarchical divide, interacting and

learning together in such a way, could help dismantle traditional barriers to parents' engagement with services.

A report on the factors that affected parent participation in the UK's Sure Start programs concluded by recommending the potential for parent ambassadors to make a positive difference (Avis et al., 2007). In this study, it was parent facilitators that performed the parent ambassador role, bridging the space between the service system and families that previously found services difficult to access. The coming together of parents and professionals in a shared practice is significant given the traditional power imbalance between professionals and the parents reported by Lam and Kwong (2014). The positionality of professionals in the service context, affords them possible power and privilege of being an insider. Parents as service recipients are effectively outsiders, and do not enjoy the same privilege. The concept of insider/outsider (Pike, 1954, as cited by Headland, 1990) has been written about in a variety of contexts. Merriam et al., (2001) argue that the insider can be inherently biased, and their proximity to their own culture makes it difficult for them to raise relevant questions whereas the outsider is separate enough to ask the pertinent questions. This concept is strongly reflected in this study. Through the shared practices between parents and professionals, parents appear to straddle the boundary between services and parents, and influence the thinking and practices of the professional workers they work alongside. One professional spoke about the different role parent facilitators appeared to perform:

> I'd say parents [participants in the intervention] see parent facilitators a little bit different from themselves - A safe in-between person. Not a worker, but doing something different from other parents. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

The in-between role Cecilia described, not only enabled new practices between workers and parent facilitators, but also helped parent participants feel at ease in accessing a parenting intervention:

> …I think you feel more at ease. You feel like you are being talked to and not talked at, you know. It wasn't like them and us. (Aileen, BAP Participant).

Aileen gestured towards the notion of equality that existed between parent participants and parent facilitators that helped parents relax into their relationship with professionals delivering parent support services. The data in this study repeatedly illuminated the importance of casual and informal behaviours and settings for enabling parents and their children to feel at ease and relaxed in a service setting.

A distinguishing characteristic of the relationships between parents, parent facilitators and professionals that fostered parent engagement in this study was what transpired within relationships. The proposed model of parent/professional partnership, identified in this study, and being developed in this chapter, incorporates shared reflection and learning as key factors to sustaining working partnerships between professional workers and parents.

7.4.2 Reflective learning: A shared practice between parents and professionals

In Chapter Five, reflective behaviours were discussed as a contributing towards transformation in parents' behaviours, skills and perspectives. In this section, reflective behaviours are considered as integral to a co-producing partnership between parents and professional workers.

Parents working as co-workers within a parent support intervention helped modelled and practice a culture of reflective learning for the benefit of parent participants. This study identified how parent facilitators provided a vehicle through which parent participants in the parenting intervention could interact with professionals and contribute to the development of shared language. Concepts and ideas introduced through the peer-led intervention were utilised in the ongoing reflective interactions between parent facilitators, other parents and professionals. Through their interactions and use of common artefacts (Wenger, 2010) parent participants recognised their membership to an informal learning community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as described by Giulia:

> We all keep on sharing the things we did learn in there. It just happens like that when we get into the centre together. We all experience some same things and can bring it, share it together…It makes me feel good. (Giulia, BAP participant)

The common practice of sharing learning with each other was a practice modelled for participants throughout the intervention. Giulia described above behaviours continuing as an informal practice between participants following the peer-led intervention as parents encountered each other in the CFC's. In particular, participants recognised that ongoing, shared reflective learning occurred casually through meetings (appointments with professionals) and informal encounters (preparing food together in the CFC kitchen). The following data reflect casual encounters between parents and professionals that occurred following the intervention that enabled opportunities for continued learning:

> We talk with the staff about things and they share with us too. Like it's not so confronting learning in this type of environment… (Aileen, BAP Participant)

> It's just the environment of the place and seeing all the people come in and all the little kids you know I just want to go, 'Oh hello,' you know and spend time with them and do a bit of cooking and just help out. …Well that's what's come from coming here and doing that course then. (Angela, BAP Participant)

Opportunities for continued recall and practice of key concepts and language, between a diverse group of professionals and parents, appeared to engender an environment of knowledge and skill development for participants' in this study. Ongoing reflection and learning between participants occurred quite informally in the CFC environment. Reflection emerged through the data as to a core behaviour, modelled for parents in the peer-led intervention. The use of reflective behaviours may be another example in this study of the previously discussed concept of 'identity resources' (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Participants' common understanding and recognition of reflection, practiced with their peers, helped build a sense of belonging amongst them and provided a framework for the reorientation of views and actions (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000).

Particular parenting skills and concepts also emerged as common identity resources in this study. This was evident in parents and professionals jointly observing a child's behaviour and reflecting together on the needs of the child before responding. Such informal shared learning processes did not arise out of purposeful service planning, but rather evolved as a by-product of the same practices modelled by the parent facilitators through the delivery of the parenting intervention. Participants described how learning continued to occur quite informally through spontaneous reflection between participants of the peer-led intervention, parent facilitators and professionals. This is illustrated in the data excerpt below:

> I was with a mum who was a BAP participant and her little boy lost control of his temper because he wants to go outside. Outside he continued his tantrum because he had lost contact with what the tantrum was about. The mum said to me, "ok, I'm going to ignore what he is doing and see how it goes". I was with her as she did it and I was able to talk through the event as we watched. The dad was there watching and learning as well. [Sally] who is the parent facilitator of the course, was there watching all of this also. She was smiling and nodding. We all understood we were learning together. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

As an EPEC supervisor, Lidia recalled an example of spontaneous informal learning that occurred between herself, a parent facilitator and a parent participant of the peer-led intervention. However, on several occasions during the study, professionals, including those not associated with the peer-led intervention, and parents who were involved with the

intervention, were observed sharing common language and core concepts that were introduced to parents through the intervention. These exchanges, and use of common 'artefacts' (Wenger, 2010), helped to define those involved as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). Through their ongoing interactions, members of this loose knit group could not only deepen their knowledge and expertise (Wenger et al., 2002) but together continue to define the practice architectures which may have been constrained over time by practice traditions of professionals and service environments (Kemmis et al., 2013). The diversity of experiences and contributions from the learning community membership of professionals, parent facilitators and parent participants, may have helped foster a bi-directional and iterative relationship between relationship building and personal development. The diverse and rich membership of the community of practice evident in this study, and members' interrelated practices, enabled a relationship dynamic to emerge resulting in new meaning making. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) called this 'knowledgeability'. The new meaning emerges from the convergence of many practices in which no one can claim complete competence. However, Etienne Wenger insists knowledgeability is not just information. It is also the experience of being in a practice landscape and negotiating ones position in it (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, & Wenger-Trayner, (2016).

The type of reflective behaviours and exchanges between professional and parents, described in this chapter, may not be common in many parent support contexts and can reflect practice that is different from some practitioners' previous experience. One professional acknowledged the need for workers to be supported through the process of navigating new ways of being with parents, as co-members of the practice community:

> It takes a real genuineness and humility on the part of the worker to engage differently. It requires them to genuinely 'wonder'. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

In addition to the support required for professionals to change practices, parents involved in the service model also needed support to challenge their own constructions of professionals they were working alongside. A parent facilitator highlighted this situation:

> I see them as separate, higher up. Maybe it's a bit of my own insecurity not ever being up to that level. I still see them as separate. It's really funny isn't it cos I'm probably just as good as everyone else. But, yes, I do, I see them as super beings. They told me that comment – 'don't put yourself down'. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

Karen's statement provided an example of the change required in order to establish more equitable balance in relationships in which professionals attempt to work in partnership with parents. This resonates with Freire's assertion about transformation of structures in order to achieve emancipatory outcomes whereby previously oppressed people can "…feel like masters of their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions…" (Freire, 2005, p. 124). Even as an experienced parent facilitator, Karen demonstrated her continued view of herself as less deserving than the professionals she worked alongside.

As discussed in Chapter Five, adopting new practices and perspectives takes time. In order for parents to be supported to transform their own perspectives, assume roles as co-workers within the service system, and be influential for other parents, they need to experience relationships within the service context that dismantle traditional hierarchical barriers that often exist between professionals and parents. Cecilia, an EPEC coordinator who had supervised several parent facilitators, described the relationship as mentorship where she was able to help enable parents' skill development to undertake the role and provide support when personal issues arose:

> It's a mentor type relationship between me and the parent facilitators. … developing their skills in relation to facilitating the course. And I learn too!
> …developing their skills around personal stuff that comes up for them. You're not these parents' therapist or counsellor, but you are there, when they go through big things. As a mentor you take time to listen, support, mentor and then, if necessary, put in place other support. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

The co-learning scenario described by Cecilia, mirrors the Freirian concept of the 'problem-posing educator' in which parents and workers are in dialogue with each other. Parents' "…no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators…" (Freire, 2005, p. 81) with the professionals. The specific context and environment in which these shared learning exchanges occurred appeared to provide a rich foundation for the reconceptualisation of new and transformational ways of working together. Cecilia explained how the practice of sharing personal practice issues, with parent facilitators during their regular reflective supervision sessions, helped to generate of shared learning:

> …sharing that with them and helping them see I'm learning too, seems to do something. I think it says that we're not that different really. (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Cecilia's perspective on the relationship between herself and parent facilitators moved beyond a traditional service perspective of service delivery to recognition that she was also benefitting and learning through the process. The shared practices of reflective learning between parents and professionals, identified in this study, challenges traditional hierarchical constructions of practitioner/client relationships and provides a foundation for a richer conceptualisation of working relationships between parents and professionals.

7.4.3 Parents and professionals: Co-learners, co-facilitators, co-workers

This study moves beyond proposing physical strategies employed in a co-produced initiative and seeks to illustrate the desired attributes of the relationship between professionals and parents within a service system that is intent on engaging all parents. The transformative experiences illustrated in the data in Chapter Five resulted from parent participants receiving support and access to skill development and entry to learning pathways that led to opportunities to co-facilitate a parent support intervention. One parent facilitator spoke about her own transformation from parent recipient to co-worker in a parent support service:

> I felt like "just a parent". I was in amidst of feeling not very important just doing the whole role cos children take a lot from you and don't get a whole lot back… Doing all this process from becoming a facilitator, suddenly I've got these all these people sitting in front of me learning the EPEC message also and they're looking at me like I'm super important, and I'm feeling super important because I'm teaching this special thing that means a lot to me that's taught me so much. (Karen, parent facilitator)

Karen's transformation was enabled by the trust, rapport and support offered to her by professionals, from a variety of disciplines, who were effectively practicing partnership in their shared goal of enabling Karen and her peers to work as facilitators within the parent support team. In essence, this reflects a variation of relational agency (Edwards, 2005) in that professionals could recognise, acknowledge and utilise each-others expertise towards the implicitly shared goal of nurturing a working partnership with Karen, and other parents, as co-workers. As demonstrated in this study, through their joint work, professionals were challenged to shift from a traditional perspective of what Boyle et al., (2010) described as problem fixers and distributors of resources, to being enablers, partners and facilitators with and for families. In working together, parents and professionals involved in the delivery of the peer-led intervention, began to view their

collaboration as co-constructing a mutually beneficial working relationship as described by one professional:

> This way of working is just so complementary to what we are trying to do in the CFC's. So much work has gone into supporting families and services to create a vision, a shared language and appropriate ways of working together. Community members get it quite quickly. Some services struggle with the concept though. The course [peer-led intervention] is the perfect model for workers and parents to truly practice and reinforce new ways working together. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

Lidia cautioned that such a model of practice does not come easily to all professionals. The parent/professional partnership she described reflects the concept of distributed expertise Edward's (2007a) that views knowledge as a resource that can be distributed across a system and utilised by those who recognise it and are able to access it (Edwards, 2011; 2007a). Lidia articulated the presence of distributed expertise between herself and a parent facilitator when she offered:

> I respect [parent facilitator name] for what she brings to our work together and I know she respects my experience and what I bring. More importantly, I can just see the difference our relationship makes for the parents we work with in the BAP course. (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

Lidia's description of the mutual respect between herself and parent facilitators indicates that parent participants were not just party to negotiating a practice but they were also co-producers of new practices. Both parties contributed their own expertise, which was then distributed through a new paradigm of partnership 'across boundaries of practice' (Edwards, 2011). Another illustration of this was evident in the work between a parent facilitator and a professional in this study. A parent facilitator recalled her experience of accompanying the EPEC coordinator on an interstate work trip to facilitate an overview of the peer-led intervention for other interested agencies:

> I went to Melbourne and back in a day with [EPEC coordinator name] to talk about EPEC with service providers in [name of community]. I was amazed to be with a group of people who want better for their community – they know there is a need, and they want to help… We worked as a good team.
> (Annabelle, Parent Facilitator)

Performing an active role in promoting the peer-led intervention in other communities, Annabelle's experience was an illustration of the mutual recognition of complementary skills and experience between the two. Significantly, Annabelle had never participated in

work related travel and would previously have not entertained the thought of being included in such an event. However, from the EPEC coordinators perspective it was Annabelle's contribution to the meeting that was most beneficial for the professionals they presented to:

> Annabelle and I were both nervous and excited about it. Flying somewhere 'for work' was a new experience for her but I could see it made her feel pretty special. I was able to do all the background and theory stuff for the group who we were presenting to. But it was her contribution, her honesty, how she told her own story that had everyone deeply interested. They asked her lots of questions and I could see she just relaxed into it. She was amazing. On the way back to the airport she said "I reckon they liked us and we did ok". (Cecilia, EPEC Supervisor)

Cecilia's observation about Annabelle's contribution to the meeting indicates the value she placed on the parent facilitator's practice wisdom through the sharing of her lived experience. It also highlighted distributed expertise (Edwards, 2007a) present in the partnership between Cecilia (a professional) and Annabelle (a parent facilitator).

Another parent facilitator, Rachel observed how her experience as a sole parent and living in the community in which she was working, gave her credibility in the eyes of professional staff:

> I'm now a worker at the CFC… I see that they [professional workers] take notice of me because I know what it is like to live here, I know what it's like to be a mum by herself, and I know what it's like to be learning, um, learning to be a parent facilitator of BAP and a worker. They ask me my ideas and but not always do we agree. But they do listen. (Rachel, Parent Facilitator)

Rachel's experience of being respected and listened to by professionals is another example of the value that was given to the lived experience of parents working alongside professionals in this study. Rachel again signals to the notion of distributed expertise (Edwards, 2011). Not only do the parent facilitator and professional share their core expertise but also share what Edwards refers to as relational expertise (2011).

Through their shared experiences, parent facilitators and professionals were able to begin to view and understand each other from new perspectives. In a healthcare context, it has been argued that the experience of understanding others perspectives through a process of co-production helps uncover assumptions that have shaped ones practices and lifestyles (Freire & Sangiorgi, 2010). As with most relationships, tensions can emerge in working

relationships between parents and professionals as they begin to challenge traditionally held deficit views or perspectives about the group which the other represents (parent or professional). As discussed in Chapter Two, Fialka et al., (2012) likened the concept of partnership to a dance with the process of partnership development comprising three phases; 'colliding and campaigning'; 'cooperating and compromising,'; and finally 'creative partnering and collaborating'. All three phases have been illuminated in the data through this study as participants described their own experiences of learning to work within new relational dynamics. Challenge associated with learning to work with others from different backgrounds and experiences can open the door to new perspectives and realisations about previously held assumptions (Mezirow, 1990). These new perspectives and understandings can result in new ways of working together. The notion of new perspectives and shared knowledge being birthed through collaboration is reflected in Anne Edwards' work on relational agency and what can occur at the boundaries where practices intersect (Edwards, 2011). She argues that working relationally at the boundaries of services is challenging because it involves renegotiation of expertise between professionals where practitioners may not be able to easily manipulate practices. Furthermore working relationally at the boundaries might also affect individuals' power, resources and identities (Edwards, 2011). However, what occurs at the intersections of practices between parents and professionals, when working together within a climate of co-production, has not been examined in the literature. This study provides an insight into the shared practices between parents and professionals where traditional hierarchical boundaries of professional practice are reconceptualised to enable democratic relationships and a service culture that respects and values the contribution of parents.

7.4.4 Processes, behaviours and environments that help foster co-producing partnerships

The physical presentation and organisation of service settings can influence families' access to services (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou 2012). In this study parent engagement was supported by specific practitioner behaviours and interactions occurring in open, welcoming physical spaces. Participants in this study referred to observing and experiencing an informality and warmth in the environment, behaviours and interactions between professionals, parent facilitators and parent participants:

> …the atmosphere there is more family friendly, laid back. Ah the way [workers name], the way she's done it, like um she has coffee machines, she has a kids play area there, and her - just her attitude. She's very nice and easy going. I find it hard to mingle, make friends, but with these people, I found them really easy going and easy to talk to. (Dianna, BAP Participant)

From Dianna's perspective, the combination of environment and relaxed professional behaviours appeared to act as the glue that helped build and sustain partnerships between parents and workers. Parent participants' were able to describe examples of behaviours and environments that were appealing because they were relaxing and casual:

> You don't feel like you're going into like a classroom atmosphere, it was just like really relaxing. I felt at home. … They're putting thoughts into us and then it all just comes out, you know, and because they're giving as well. (Angela, BAP Participant)

> I could just go right in there, and um, just feel comfortable to do things with [name of child]. I don't feel like anyone is watching me. Some other parents I know from the BAP and then some others as well who are there, like me, just to be around with others. We can just get ourselves a drink and soup, and when we want, talk to the nurse or the worker about things that we are finding sometimes difficult. I now see some other parents around the place [community], even ones I don't know, and I tell them about the centre to um, to make sure they know they can go there too. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

Both participants quoted above speak to how the affordances of the physical environment, and the service philosophy, combine to create enabling conditions for parents to access parent support services. Some parents fear being judged by services and lack the confidence to initiate contact with services (Carbone, Fraser, Ramburuth & Nelms, 2003). However, one of the professionals who participated in this study described how initial approaches to service visitors helped them to be comfortable in the process of accessing the service through experiencing others involved in the service were just like themselves:

> Parents who might not want to visit 'a service' … when they get here they say 'oh, ok, I don't get treated like a number. I can come right in, get comfy, see other people like me, and know that the facilitators are just more people like me. I can do this.' (Lidia, EPEC Supervisor)

The interplay of environmental and behavioural factors evident through the study data, appears to work together to communicate a consistent message to parents about the provision of non-stigmatising approaches to engaging and working with families. The participation of the parent facilitators, together with the welcoming relaxed environment, appeared to be influential in attracting the initial attention and early engagement of parents

who may not have previously engaged with services. The various perspectives of transformation evident in this study culminating in the potential for transformed approaches to the provision of parenting education were discussed in Chapter Five. Again the data in this study provides evidence that professionals' interpersonal skills and behaviour, together with the welcoming physical environments may contribute to the development of what is being described in this study as a co-producing partnership between parents and service providers.

A study by Coen and Kearns (2013) considered the role of parents who don't reside with their children, in shaping the design and delivery of services. They maintained that service models are influenced and shaped by frequent formal and informal interactions between those using the service and professionals (Coen & Kearns, 2013). This study has identified the significance of informal interactions, supported by parent facilitators, in engaging community members who are hesitant about encounters with professionals in service settings. This leads to the proposition that professional behaviours and service environments can both help and hinder the engagement of previously disengaged families. This study demonstrates that local parents, working as co-workers in the service system, can play a multifaceted role in suspending entrenched power hierarchies in services. The role of parent facilitators, of a peer-led parenting intervention enabled facilitators to model and practice a form of distributed expertise (Edwards, 2007a) with professionals, and, as a consequence, contribute towards parenting support services being more accessible to families.

7.5 A unique form of partnership at the intersection of conceptual frameworks

The notion of expertise being distributed and acknowledged between professionals working towards a common goal (Edwards, 2007a) has been discussed earlier in this thesis. Edwards also refers to common knowledge emerging from the boundaries where practices intersect, and the intersection of practices that supports learning and insight into the purposes of others and their practices. This, she argues, enables collaboration (2011). In this study, the cumulative effect of parent facilitators, professionals and parents collaborating together at the triadic intersections of relational agency (Edwards, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2011), reflective practice (Schon, 1983; Mezirow, 1990; Thompson & Pascal, 2012), and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger,

McDermott & Snyder, 2002), resulted in what appeared to be a unique form of partnership practice.

The relationship between parent facilitators and professionals described through this study is indeed a form of partnership practice, deemed to be a necessary component of authentic co-production (Dunston et al., 2009). Through their strengthened relationship, the partners became active co-designers of new ways of being together through practices that dismantled traditional hierarchical barriers. Parent participants described the difference in a number of ways. This included professionals behaving in ways that communicated interest and helped parents feel 'comfortable' as described by Sally:

> It makes a real difference for parents here in [community name] that the workers here are real friendly. They're interested in us, um, and they do care. Like the other place in [community name], well, there you're treated different, like you're not as good as other mums. But here it's all good and people come because we feel comfortable. (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

Another parent noted the difference it made to observe parent facilitators seeking and receiving help from professionals in the process of facilitating the parent led parenting intervention:

> …it was good to see that some do actually care …and even with [practitioner's name]. It was two other parents who were doing it [facilitating the intervention] but they were asking some help from the worker if they weren't sure and it was good to see. (Giulia, BAP Participant)

In addition, another participant highlighted a sense of equality she experienced in not feeling judged by appearances and through the experience of participating as a co-learner alongside a variety of professionals in a five-day training course:

> Equality is huge – like it doesn't matter what sort of car you pull up in, it doesn't matter what sort of clothes you wear, it doesn't matter you know, like, that's the whole thing about this place is that there is no judgment… We were terrified [entering Family Partnership Model course]. We were sitting there with doctors and psychologists, social workers and other professionals. That was daunting! But I tell you what, out of all the courses I have done – I got the most out of that one. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

The examples of experiencing equality, described by parent participants in the above excerpts suggest that professionals involved were working in ways that helped enable the parents to notice and experience opportunities to interact differently with professionals. Cottam (2018) argued that authentic human connections, in working alongside each other, are required to create change that enables a rediscovery of the original intention of

services. Cottam questions "…what would happen if we gave families the support and resources to take the power into their own hands, to build their own way out?" (p. 62). Her provocation arises from a critical perspective that simply reworking existing institutions is not the solution to individuals not having the ability to live to their true potential, in societies that remain so unequal. The necessary change in practice for this to occur may be helped by what Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2015) refer to as 'opening up communicative spaces'. They argue that encounters between individuals in a shared commitment to communicative action can help transcend the self-interests of individuals to take care of the interests of others. Although this assertion emanates from a critical participatory action research context, the premise of this is reflected in the partnership practices evidenced between parents and professionals in this study. Participants' perceptions of changed dynamics in their interactions with and alongside professionals may have influenced the parent support service culture.

The previously discussed concept, 'practice architectures' (Kemmis et al., (2013) is useful in explaining those things that shape and constrain practices (2013) and therefore influence service culture. Transformed practice involves what Kemmis calls the "…sayings and doings and relatings that compose practices" (Kemmis, 2009, p. 466). That is, how people make sense of their practice, what they do in their practice and their relation to others in practice (2009). Kemmis et al., (2014) argued that what can emerge are 'ecologies of practice' in that different practices can co-exist in a site and be interdependent of other practices. It is also true that the way people act within service contexts have traditionally been enabled or constrained by practice traditions and practice landscapes (Kemmis et al., 2013). The concept of ecologies of practice (Kemmis et al., 2014) resonates with Edward's concept of working relationally at the boundaries of services (2011). Whilst both of these concepts are useful in reconceptualising practices between professionals, this study proposes a space for the same to occur in the practices between professionals and parents in a parenting support service context. For this to be possible parents would need to feel comfortable exercising greater authority in the process of renegotiating practices with professionals through an enabling service landscape.

The concept of 'practice architecture' helps interpret the mobilization of complementary concepts in the co-producing partnership model being proposed in this thesis. 'Practice architecture' adds validity to the evolving nature of practice identified through this

research. It offers an explanation for the interaction of the complementary concepts of reflective practice (Schon) as 'saying', communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as 'doing', and relational agency (Edwards) as 'relating'. The interface of these concepts provide the mechanics for the reproduction of new and shared practices between professionals, parent facilitators and parents, and provide a template for ways of working together that could be transferrable to other service contexts.

7.6 Summary

This chapter brings together several complementary theoretical concepts that reinforce the case for a re-conceptualisation of approaches to parent support which reflect democratic and respectful models of partnership with parents. The significant body of literature from both psychological and sociological disciplines, and the compelling data assembled through this thesis, provide a new perspective. It enables parents to move from a traditional position of service recipient in a parent support service context to performing active roles in the co-production of a new model of practice. The model of co-producing partnership, described in this chapter, illustrates a unique form of relationship between parents and professionals that could improve engagement with parents experiencing adversity.

The model of co-producing partnership was evident in work undertaken between parents and professionals in the provision of a parent led parenting intervention. The components that characterise a co-producing partnership between professionals and parents has been detailed in this chapter. These include a set of behaviours and processes that enable reflective learning partnerships between parents and professionals that enable the emergence of unique perspectives and new ways of working together. Through sustained and authentic relationships with families on the periphery of services, professionals, and the systems they work within, could move towards new conceptualisations of 'parent support'. Such a shift in the provision of parent support interventions ultimately has the potential to enable services to be more accessible to families experiencing adversity.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In this thesis the progress of research investigating parents' experiences of participating in a peer-led parenting intervention has been documented. This has included the articulation of the methodology, a consideration of previous research and the analysis of rich data. The data analysis was supported by a variety of theoretical perspectives drawn from the social sciences, which enabled an in depth examination of alternative approaches to the design and delivery of parent support interventions. Previous chapters have outlined the transformative impact of parents working alongside practitioners in the provision of a peer-led parenting intervention. Transformative experiences identified in this study included personal transformations for parents both participating in and facilitating a peer-led intervention. Transformation in service approaches was also evident as partnership between parents and professionals evolved, working together in the provision of parent support.

Participants in this study reported changes in their personal approaches to parenting and their successful application of newly acquired parenting skills and concepts in other relationships and contexts. It was also identified that ongoing reflection and practice of core concepts and artefacts from a peer-led parenting intervention, led participants to transformed perspectives about themselves, their children and their personal situations. This study identified the impact of reflective behaviours, shared across the traditional boundaries of parent and professionals, which enabled the emergence of a loosely structured community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The ongoing shared reflective learning that occurred enabled new perspectives to evolve for participating parents. Personal experiences of 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1978), shared between parents and professionals, appeared to also enable a transformed model of practice in a parenting support service context.

It remains to draw this thesis to a conclusion, consider the research questions posed in this study, clearly articulate the findings, and offer some reflections arising out of the study. In this chapter the research questions are directly addressed with reference to the data and the discussion in previous chapters. The contribution this study makes to the field of parent

support, and recommendations arising from this research, are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter concludes with consideration of the limitations of this study and possible future directions for research in the field of parent support.

8.2 Transforming approaches to the parenting education landscape

The primary question this study sought to investigate was:

What insights do the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting intervention provide for approaches to parenting education and the provision of parent support services?

The following sub-questions emerged through an ongoing iterative process of immersion in the relevant literature, and data analysis:

- What are the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting program?
- In what ways do the experiences of parents' participation in a peer-led parenting intervention influence their parenting and their relationships?
- What insights can the parents' experiences provide for program designers, policy makers and service providers?

The sections that follow present findings that directly address and answer these sub-questions followed by a section that responds to the primary research question. The discussions in the following section focus on participants' direct experiences from participation in a peer-led parenting intervention and continue in subsequent sections to elucidate the multi-faceted transformational personal experiences described by some participants. This is followed by a description of the evidence from this study that identifies how personal transformative experiences for parent participants influenced the nature of their relationships with professionals resulting in the evolution of a unique model of partnership.

8.2.1 "What are the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting program?"

In previous chapters the discussion of the data focused on a variety of transformative experiences both for parent participants who participated in a peer-led parenting program and the professionals involved. This was particularly evident for those who continued to

reflectively interact with their peers and professionals through a loosely structured community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This study has illuminated a variety of interdependent behaviours and processes identified in the provision of a service-based peer-led parenting intervention that helped enable parents to transform their own behaviours and perspectives. Significant transformative experiences identified through this study occurred as a result of ongoing reflective learning, and practice of acquired concepts and skills, between participants and professionals. Participants were able to clearly identify the sometimes informal exchanges within a learning community that supported reflective learning practices and lead to new perspectives and behaviours:

> I'm part of a community. Things get aired and talked about and people get encouraged too – it's not as scary as you might originally think. It is kind of a natural progression… All the little things along the way. The steps you take along the way that get people in too – I guess like a different perspective of what goes on or how life is, or that it's easier to do. We talk with the staff about things and they share with us too. Like it's not so confronting learning in this type of environment [Child and Family Centre] because your friends are going in to do things or, standing around with people you know so it is easier to get involved, easier to pick things up. (Aileen, BAP participant)

Parents who participated in this study readily identified such learning experiences that were directly attributable to participation in the peer-led intervention. Supported by the experience of learning alongside others like themselves, participants consistently reported a shift in personal perceptions from feeling stressed and alone to feeling calm. The continued use of terms like 'good enough parent', 'I'm not alone', 'I'm just like other parents', indicated a sense of calm and control felt by participants. The changes in participants' perceptions of themselves helped them to respond efficaciously in parenting situations that they previously might have found difficult or stressful.

The correlation between an individual's perceived increase in social support and stress reduction has previously been identified (Respler-Herman et al., 2011). However, the social support that derived from the experience of the peer-led intervention, enabled participants to continue to interact with peers (parents and parent facilitators) sharing and practicing newly acquired concepts and skills. The social support also enabled them to feel better skilled and confident in their parenting and apply newly acquired behaviours and skills in other contexts. Given the original conveyors of these practices were parent facilitators,

whom parent participants viewed as 'real' and 'just one of us', their credibility and congruence appeared to help participants have the confidence to successfully replicate the same behaviours in other parenting and social contexts.

8.2.2 In what ways do the experiences of parents' participation in a peer-led parenting intervention influence their parenting and their relationships?"

The data and its analysis within the selected literature supports an argument developed through this thesis that parents can experience significant personal transformation from learning through relationships with other parents and professionals arising out of participation in a peer-led parenting intervention. As highlighted in Chapter Four, 'transformative change' was identified as the overarching theme to emerge from the data in this study. Transformations that the participants experienced in their parenting and social relationships were discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Significantly, the experience of the intervention, the social networks that developed from it, and the ongoing interactions with other parents and professionals as mentioned in the previous section, appeared to help participants transform their own self perceptions, positioning themselves as more skilful in their relationships.

Participants' regular reference to 'thinking more' illustrated how reflective behaviours, modelled by parent facilitators, were carried into other contexts by parent participants. For some participants, this resulted in them being able to identify how sustained reflection helped them to act on complex issues in their personal lives. The personal growth, increased confidence and opportunities offered to participants through their involvement in the parenting intervention, sometimes resulted in tension in other parts of their lives. Three participants in this study described events of controlling or jealous behaviour by their partners, arising from their involvement in the parenting intervention. When engaging parents in processes or interventions that may result in transformed perspectives and practices that can potentially destabilize existing relationships, it is therefore important to maintain a critical perspective of the ecological influences on individual participants.

8.2.3 "What insights can the parents' experiences provide for program designers, policy makers and service providers?"

The findings from this study illuminate a number of pertinent insights for services in relation to reconceptualising practices within services that help enable parenting services to be more accessible to parents who have struggled to trust professionals.

They are:

- **Account for the variable contexts that influence families -** Parents and their children are potentially influenced not only by services interventions but also others within their family and social networks. Understanding the ecological influences experienced by parents and children helps determine the barriers and enablers to individuals' ability to sustain newly acquired skills, behaviours and perspectives. Therefore, interventions that aim to increase skills and confidence of parents will be more successful if parents are not supported in isolation from situations and events that influence their ability to exercise personal agency. By way of example, some participants in this study encountered tension in their intimate relationships resulting from their own personal growth and development that occurred due to their involvement in a peer-led parenting intervention.
- **Establish trust in relationships with parents -** Environmental characteristics of services and the interpersonal skills of professionals, communicate to parents the priority that is given to engaging families who have found services difficult to access. Informal and welcoming service settings, and practitioner behaviours, can contribute to the establishment of trusting relationships with parents. Identifying and addressing the sharp edges evident in services can help improve the credibility of parent support services from the perspective of families who view professionals and services with suspicion. Processes that aim to soften the sharp edges of service will require careful examination in relation to the bidirectional nature of the distribution of knowledge and expertise between professionals and parents, and the influence of the environmental and structural contexts in which parenting interventions are provided.
- **Parents can make profound contributions as co-workers in services –** Parents sometimes find it more helpful to receive parenting advice from family and friends, particularly when they have experienced difficulty in trusting professionals (Ablewhite, 2014; Roehlkepartain et al., 2002). Parents, who experience adversity

and view services with suspicion, may view their peers as credible and turn to them for advice. Engaging parents as co-workers in parenting services can therefore support the restoration of trust between services and families disengaged from the system.

- **Model reflective practices and behaviours for parents** - Personal transformations are enabled through critical reflection and the learning that emanates from it. The explicit modelling of reflective thinking and learning was shown in this study to foster bi-directional learning between professionals and parents and enabled parents to implement the same behaviours in other contexts. Processes within services focused on the design, implementation and delivery of services for parents, provide a platform on which reflective behaviours can be modelled and reinforced.

The insights outlined above for program designers, policy makers and service providers were reinforced repeatedly through the data in this study. Reflecting these findings, it was also evident that the practices associated with implementing such actions in a parenting support service context are reliant on the existence of authentic partnerships between professionals and parents in which power is equitably distributed and negotiated. This was powerfully captured by a parent participating in this study in describing her experience participating in a five-day course alongside other parents and professional staff:

> Equality is huge – like it doesn't matter what sort of car you pull up in, it doesn't matter what sort of clothes you wear, it doesn't matter you know, like, that's the whole thing about this place is that there is no judgment… We were sitting there with doctors and psychologists, social workers and other professionals. That was daunting! But I tell you what, out of all the courses I have done – I got the most out of that one. (Aileen, BAP Participant)

The co-producing partnership model proposed in this thesis deconstructs traditional hierarchical boundaries of power and facilitates opportunities for parents to partner with professionals in shared practices through the provision of interventions that support other parents. Emerging out of the reflective learning relationships between parents and professionals, some participants experienced profound changes in their personal situations and increased opportunities for workforce participation as described by Sally below:

> Well, one thing led to another thing and after being out of work and stuck at home by myself – a single mum, autistic kid, can't go anywhere… now look at me. BAP facilitator, workin in the CFC, on the committee and it goes on. I've just got the job

> cleaning the centre and they call me to do the centre assistant work sometimes. (Sally, Parent Facilitator)

As discussed in previous chapters, some participants were able to articulate their contribution to the co-production of new practices with professionals enabling parenting services to be more accessible to other parents.

8.3 'What insights do the experiences of parents participating in a peer-led parenting intervention provide for approaches to parenting education and the provision of parent support services?

Earlier in this thesis it has been argued that there is an absence in the research literature in relation to the possible contribution of parents in the co-delivery of interventions in communities characterised by disadvantage. This suggests there exists a significant dearth of alternative models of service provision in this field.

The model of co-producing partnership, that has been developed and presented in this thesis draws on the concepts of partnership with parents (Davis & Day, 2010), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1998), reflective practice (Schon, 1983), and relational agency (Edwards, 2005). As was evident in the data from this study, the model of co-producing partnership emphasises the importance of services being able to support parents to make the transition from being service 'users' to service 'contributors'.

It is proposed that the exemplar of the peer-led parenting intervention, which encouraged a culture of shared reflection and learning between parents and professionals, provided a foundation on which parents and professionals could begin to collaborate as co-workers. The resulting partnership illuminated through this study provides insights into possibilities for reconceptualising and practicing new ways of working together that benefit families who may have found services difficult to access. A systematic review of the literature on 'hard-to-reach' families identified that engaging families in services necessitates building relationships with families, understanding their needs, and designing interventions that meet those needs (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). It follows that parents are more likely to engage with services and programs that are not more than locally relevant but also co-constructed and even co-delivered by the community they are intended to serve (Whalley et al., 2010). Furthermore, evidence from data in this study has highlighted the importance of the relationships professionals have with parents in generating a service culture that

enabled co-production. The type of relationships that kept parents engaged as facilitators of the peer-led parenting intervention was poignantly described by a parent facilitator:

> I've never worked with people who give good feedback, that tell you you're doin a great job. I've never done that. It's just been an overall a really good feeling. A feel good moment. It's just been really wonderful…… The network is pretty nice, pretty special. You actually feel like you're really important… it wraps up a wonderful example of how things should be. (Karen, Parent Facilitator)

The strong sense of belonging, personal value, and efficacy conveyed in Karen's description of the parent/professional relationship provides some insight into the equality and unconditional positive regard necessary in a co-producing partnership.

This thesis argues for a move away from proceduralist understanding of co-production which can impose a largely uncompromising, unidirectional benevolence on entire communities. This has led to the proposition that co-production might be redefined in the context of these findings. Authentic efforts to establish co-producing partnerships with parents, in engaging and supporting families who have previously found services difficult to access, are characterised by equitable relationships that reflect bi-directional use of power; sincere compromise; and, shared reflective practices. These have been shown in this study to result in the co-authorship of new ways of working together between parents and professionals in a parent support context.

8.3.1 Rethinking parenting support

Throughout the discussions of data in this thesis, attention has been drawn to the issue of disengagement between services and those families that would benefit most from their support (Evangelou et al., 2013). Australian services that focus on parent and family support have traditionally been designed, implemented and governed by professionals, administrators and researchers across a variety of disciplines. The findings from this study challenge traditional expert-led approaches to the implementation and provision of parenting education placing emphasis instead on changing practices in services to enable relationships between professionals and parents that reflect shared learning and equitable distribution of power.

It has been clearly illustrated in this thesis that the peer-led intervention provided opportunities that led to transformational change for some parent participants. It has also been established that parent's involvement in the intervention helped enable a change of

practice in relationships between parents and professionals. The discussion in previous chapters, based on the data and concepts from other research, helps to identify implications for services in both the provision of parenting support interventions and enabling an environment conducive to transformative change for both parents and professional workers. These were described in section 8.2.3 of this chapter.

Within this study, the influence of parents as co-workers as manifested in their casual appearance and approaches, through their facilitation of a parenting intervention, appeared to be significant in putting other parents at ease in their connection with parenting support services. The active contribution of parent facilitators to the provision of a parenting intervention helped define the dialogic practices that created new possibilities for parents and professionals in dismantling traditional hierarchical constructs of practitioner/client relationships, and by consequence, enabling a democratic model of co-producing partnership.

The dynamic relational dyad, between parents and professionals working together as evident in this study, was characterised by shared reflection and learning, reciprocity and positive regard for the skills and expertise of each other. What emerged was a culture of shared practice, seemingly void of visible hierarchical barriers, but still defined by the bringing together of resources from different practices, helping to build what Edwards (2010) referred to as common knowledge at the boundaries of practice. Edwards claimed that this process of distributed expertise helps provide the partners with sufficient insight into the practices of the other and enables collaboration (2010).

The contribution of parent facilitators through their active participation within the local service system provided an example to other parents in relation to the flexibility and accessibility of the parenting support service. Through their work as facilitators of the peer-led intervention, parent facilitators were able to span the boundaries of practice between parents and professionals and help round off the sharp edges of the service system potentially making re-engagement with services possible for other parents.

8.4 Contributions of this Research

The findings from this study suggest a place for a new paradigm whereby parents are supported and ultimately empowered to become co-deliverers of parenting education interventions. This study questions the presence and use of power in professionally led

approaches to parent support with particular reference to where these occur in communities characterised by disadvantage.

Through the review of the existing literature, this study has drawn attention to the changing nature of social structures of which approaches to parent support need to be cognizant. The study has also questioned the absence of a critical perspective in the broad use of ecological systems theory across the family support field. This has been redressed through the incorporation of a critical perspective in this research, thus bringing the pertinent issue of power within relations to attention. By bringing together conceptual resources from different theories of the social world, this thesis has assembled a constellation of concepts that are potentially very useful in reimagining how else parenting education might be viewed and implemented for parents.

Using a critical interpretivist framework this study has questioned the appropriateness and usefulness of expert led models of parent education that target groups of parents who it appears continue to feel judged, stigmatised and subjugated by professionals. The study has argued for models of service provision in which the parents' knowledge of their children is recognised and power is shared between those involved in overseeing, facilitating and participating in a parenting intervention. A number of theoretical resources have been identified throughout this thesis that have worked effectively together in a project of re-conceptualisation of practices in parent support services enabling engagement with families who have previously found services hard to access.

This thesis has brought into play concepts that haven't had much exposure or sufficient acknowledgment in the field. The interaction between theoretical concepts such as dialogical engagement and practices (Owen et al., 2012; Talbot et al., 2017; Vandenbroek et al., 2009) together with concepts that helped explain nuances of social learning practices, have illuminated a new model of practice between parents and professionals that could strengthen approaches to parent support. The reflective social learning practices between a diverse group of participants, evident through the data in this study, was given sharp definition through the concepts embodied in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and reflective practice (Schon, 1983; 1987; Paige-Smith, Craft, 2011; Yip, 2006). The concepts of relational expertise and distributed expertise (Edwards, 2010; 2011) introduced through the broader theoretical concept of relational agency (Edwards,

2005), together with other contemporary theoretical perspectives, helped give meaning and validity to the model of co-producing partnership evident in the work between parent facilitators and professionals. Bringing in critical perspectives (Gillies, 2006; 2011; Standing 2011; 2012; Vandenbroeck et al., 2009; Vandenbroeck et al., 2010; Vandenbroeck, 2014) through which to consider the interaction between the above mentioned concepts helped to sharpen the edge of ecological systems theory and question one dimensional interpretations ecological systems theory.

8.5 Recommendations arising from this study

Two significant recommendations have emerged from this study. The first is the proposition of a broader application of a revised 'co-producing partnership model'. The concepts, behaviours and practices described through this thesis as components of a co-producing partnership between parents and professionals could be applicable beyond the remit of parenting support interventions within a system of local services. Secondly, the process of conducting this research has highlighted the importance of interventions that engage parents in such a way that ensures they are not rendered more vulnerable as a result of the intervention. Both these issues are addressed separately in the two subsections that follow.

8.5.1 System humility: A macro possibility

In Chapter Seven, the model of co-producing partnership between professionals and parents in the provision of a parent led parenting education intervention in communities characterised by disadvantage was identified and defined. This model of shared practice should be transferable to relationships across a service system, in a variety of demographic, environmental and service contexts.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the quality of humility enabled professionals to be relatable to parents, particularly for those parents who had previously struggled to engage with services. When reflected in the behaviour of parent facilitators and professionals together in a parenting support context, humility appeared to soften encounters with parents enabling them to participate in processes that resulted in the shared reflective learning practices referred to extensively in this thesis.

Given the transformative outcomes for both parents and professional/client relationships illustrated through this study, it is argued that the same practices and concepts described in

the model of co-producing partnership be used as a framework for supporting services across disciplines to develop a culture of practice that reflects and supports empowering approaches to human service delivery.

8.5.2 Conducting research in communities characterised by disadvantage.

The findings from this research have provided insights into the potentially transformative changes parent participants experienced when participating in a peer-led parenting intervention. Some participants experiences captured in this study have potential to inform the field about the tension that can emerge for research participants arising out of ongoing reflective learning with other parents and professionals. Some participants in this study described experiences in which their existing relationships with their partners where disturbed as a result of their own personal changed perspectives and transformation.

Research is an intervention which can influence those involved including the researcher, participants of the study, and those intimately connected to them. What might be considered a beneficial outcome or change experienced by a participant can have a destabilizing effect for others around them. There is an ethical imperative for the researcher to detect and remove any components of a research process that might have a deleterious effect on participants (Bussell et al., 1995). Whilst difficult to anticipate, the researcher must consider how the research process can influence participants' thoughts, actions, and behaviours outside of the research activity. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the practitioner or researcher to provide for the safe and unhindered participation of potentially vulnerable clients/participants in any intervention that could increase an individual's vulnerability. There is an ethical imperative to ensure those participating in parenting interventions or associated research processes are adequately supported in other contexts beyond the immediate reach of the service or research intervention.

8.6 Limitations of this research

This study explored parents' experiences within one innovative model of parent support. In this way, a deep attention was able to be applied to the relationships and lived experiences of the participants within one cycle of the program. This has generated rich insights and propelled the research towards an argument for renewed attempts to involve parents in service co-design within a newly conceived set of conceptual resources. Such in-depth,

focused research comes at the expense of generalisability and the production of quantifiable data. Therefore there is a need for other studies that can and should be undertaken. Despite being a small scale study, this was balanced by the richness of data collected through in-depth interviews with study participants which occurred over several months and cycles of the parenting program they were participating in. However, this study does not provide any data on the degree to which changes in parenting were sustained as a result of participation in the program. These types of conclusions could only be drawn from a longitudinal study that examines longer term transformative change experienced by the participants over time.

This study involved participants who were living in communities that had been identified as disadvantaged through formal data sources (Kids come first report, 2009) and were therefore not broadly representative of all Australian parents. As outlined in section 8.2.3, there was some evidence in this study of participants experiencing barriers and tensions in their personal lives resulting from their participation in a peer-led parenting intervention. Given the stage in the study at which this became evident, this research was unable to gather rich qualitative data to properly investigate the nature of such barriers and the longer term outcomes associated with them. Future research could investigate the extent to which parents' participation in a peer led parenting intervention can impact on their relationships with their partners and what might be factors that help address issues that can arise as a result of participants' involvement in the parenting program. Lastly, the peer-led parenting intervention described in this study appears to work effectively for services and parents in communities characterised by disadvantage and there are a number of stakeholders that enable its success who have not been heard through the data in this study. These include other staff and volunteers who work in the CFC's, funders of the intervention, policy makers, and the UK based authors of the intervention.

8.7 Future directions for research

This study has drawn attention to the potential for parents to collaborate with professionals in the co-design of a new practice model that supported other parents to participate in a parent support intervention. The current research has opened up space for other productive lines of enquiry that could expand understanding of the potential contribution parents can make to the provision of parenting support services in communities characterised by disadvantage.

As discussed in section 8.6, further research is also necessary to investigate the longer term impacts experienced by parents through their participation in and co-facilitation of a peer-led parenting intervention. An ethnographic longitudinal qualitative study, focused on the parent facilitators and EPEC supervisors' experiences, could provide insight into the sustained effect of the personal transformations experienced by parent participants illustrated in this thesis and the nature of barriers and enablers that can arise as a result of these changes. The longitudinal study could also investigate the longer term sustainability of the co-producing partnership model evident between practitioners and EPEC parent facilitators in this study. In addition, EPEC professionals, service managers and policy makers involved in EPEC governance could contribute valuable insights to this study. Such research could include the engagement of males and females comprising parents involved in the EPEC peer-led parenting intervention and their partners. Partners of EPEC participants may be engaged through the support of both the EPEC participants and the professional workers involved in supervising the intervention. Methods for collecting data from partners of EPEC participants, as well as professionals and policy makers, could include a series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews and pre and post intervention focus groups. Significant numbers of research participants from all groups described above, contributing their experiences with EPEC over a three to four year period, could build on and deepen the conclusions drawn in this thesis. .

This study makes a small but important contribution to the field of service driven parent support. The notion of what it means to work in partnership with people experiencing adversity is still under researched and requires further attention. More evidence is needed in relation to co-production as a concept that relates to the interface between community members and service providers, particularly in a relational dynamic that reflects authentic reciprocal sharing of power through the shared authorship of new ways of working together for the benefit of other families. Similarly, the findings provide insights into the potential for community members to make a profound contribution to the design and implementation of approaches to parenting education that enable participation of parents who have experienced difficulty accessing services

There is also a need for more, larger scale qualitative studies to identify the broader potential of shared practices between parents and professionals. Specifically:

- *How does the co-producing partnership between parents and professionals influence the accessibility of parenting support services?* and;
- *What other opportunities and roles emerge for parent facilitators in the longer term resulting from their involvement in the facilitation of a peer-led intervention?*

Future research would benefit from representative samples or discrete groups of mothers and fathers. Research attention needs to be given to experiences of males participating in a peer-led parenting intervention and the potential for fathers to influence approaches to the delivery of parenting support interventions that aim to be accessible to men.

8.8 Conclusion

It has been evident through the process of undertaking this research and the construction of this thesis that the field of parenting education is largely driven in its design and delivery by well-intentioned professionals whose constructs and experiences influence what is offered to parents. However, this study has been able to capture the evolution of a dynamic across a shared community of parents and professionals in which traditionally hierarchical structures of power were dismantled giving way to work in partnerships characterised by reciprocal reflection and learning.

Without negating the complexity of real partnership, this study has illustrated the potential to apply the theories of partnership and co-production into contexts where suspicion and mistrust of professional practitioners may be common. The importance of relationship development and shared understanding between parties has been illuminated as a precursor to parents and professionals working effectively together within parent support service contexts. The evolution of what has been called 'co-producing partnership' in this study, was enabled through a shared culture of practice amongst key stakeholders akin to a social learning community of practice. Data illustrated examples of members of the practice community (parents and professionals) acquiring and practicing a set of skills and a reflective behaviours that were replicated by parents, and modelled for others, in other settings.

The sociological and sociocultural materials bought together in this study open up the range of possibilities for the potential transformation of traditional approaches to the provision of parent support. Authentic co-producing partnership with parents has been identified as the central and distinguishing characteristic of parent support approaches that can enable

transformations for parents and transformed approaches in the provision of parenting education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Invitation to Participate – General (Being a Parent Course Participants)

Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Research Services

Invitation to Participate – General (Being a Parent Course Participants)

Project Name: Transformations in Parenting: A case study in parent education.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study which will consider parent experiences of participating in a parent program and their perception of the impact of the program personally, and on their social relationships.

This study hopes to attract three different groups of participants:

GROUP ONE – between 5 and 7 Being a Parent participants who will be prepared to be interviewed on three separate occasions over the next four months.
GROUP TWO – about thirty Being a Parent Course participants who are prepared to complete questionnaires both before and after the course
GROUP THREE – the Being a Parent Course Facilitators who will be invited to also participate in an interview

If you think you would like to be involved in either group one or group two, please let your course facilitators know. I will then be able to contact you to discuss how you can play a part and what you will be asked to do. I am also happy to talk with you over the phone about the research.

I am conducting this research as part of my postgraduate study and it has been approved by the University of Western Sydney (UWS) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC approval number:

H9935). It will be supervised by academics from the School of Education at UWS Associate Professor Christine Woodrow (Tel: 02 4736 0184) and Dr. Dianne Jackson (Tel: 02 4758 9966). If you are interested and would like more information please contact me.

Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon

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Appendix 2: Participant consent form

Human Research Ethics
Office of Research Services

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Participant Consent Form

I…… consent to participate in the research project titled "Transformations in Parenting: A case study in parent education".

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet [or where appropriate, 'have had read to me'] and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to participate in:

1. Completing a questionnaire before the start of the BAP course and again at the end of the course.

   YES NO
   (please circle one)

2. Up to three one-on-one discussions with the researcher over the next four to five months. Each discussion will last for approximately one hour and will be audio recorded.

   YES NO

3. A BAP course that will be observed by the researcher.

   YES NO

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s now or in the future.

Signed: …….. Name: ……..

Date……..... Return Address: ……

Phone number …….. e-mail address ……..

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Approval number is H9935.

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 3. : Semi formal interviews of research participants

Interview one - Prior to commencement of the Being a Parent Course

Interview two - At completion of the Being a Parent Course

Interview three -Three months following the completion of the Being a Parent Course

Pre course interview for BAP Participants

Opening

Warm up questions to ease the participant into the process:

- How did you hear about the BAP course?
- Have you been to other courses before?
- How many children do you have? Names , ages … **Being a parent**

- What do you enjoy about being a parent?
- What do you find difficult or challenging about being a parent?
- If you could change anything about your parenting, what would it be?
- How do you know when you are going ok as a mum/dad? **Attending a parenting course**

- What do you expect the BAP course will be like?
- What do you hope to get out of the BAP course? Why?
- What things do you think you will find most difficult about attending the BAP course? **Connections**

- How would you describe your neighbourhood?
- What are the best things about your neighbourhood?
- If a person in your community needs support for themselves or their children, what is available?
- If you needed help quickly, who in your community could you turn to? **Hopes for the future**

If we were able to fast forward 5 years:

- What would you hope for your child/ren from today?
- What would you hope for yourself from today?

Post course interview for BAP Participants (interviews two and three)

Opening

Warm up questions to ease the participant into the process:

- When did you finish the BAP course?
- Who were the facilitators?
- How many how many parents attended the course? **Being a parent**

- What do you enjoy about being a parent?
- What do you find difficult or challenging about being a parent?
- If you could change anything about your parenting, what would it be?
- How do you know when you are going ok as a mum/dad? **Attending a parenting course**

- Was the BAP course like you expected it to be?
- What were the best things you got out of the course? Why?
- What did you find most difficult about the BAP course? **Connections**

- Last time we met you told me this is how you describe your neighbourhood …….. . Is there anything else you would add to that description of your neighbourhood?
- What are the best things about your neighbourhood?
- If a person in your community needs support for themselves or their children, what is available?
- If you needed help quickly, who in your community could you turn to? **Hopes for the future**

If we were able to fast forward 5 years:

- What would you hope for your child/ren from today?
- What would you hope for yourself from today?

Appendix 4.: BAP Pre & Post course questionnaires

Pre course questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to fill out this questionnaire. If you have a question about any of the questions or statements in this form, please ask your facilitator to explain it.

Identifier (first two letters of your first name and first two letters of your birth month) Eg. Paul born in August is **PAAU.** This helps the researcher match up your questionnaires for the beginning and end of the BAP course. What is your identifier? .....
What is your age?
How many children do you have?
What are the ages of your children?
Which of the following best describes your family situation? (Please tick the box for the correct statement) ☐ I live with my partner and children ☐ I live with my partner and my children live with me some of the time ☐ I live by myself with my children ☐ I live by myself and my children live with me some of the time ☐ I live by myself

Why have you joined the Being a Parent course?
What do you hope to get from attending the Being a Parent Course?
What skills do you think a parent needs to feel confident with parenting?
How do you feel about yourself as a parent?
What do you think “good parenting” looks like?

Please circle which of the following is true for each of these statements like example below.

Please also feel free to add additional comments

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

There are people who live close by that I would trust to help me if I needed help.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

If I went away for a few days there are people who live close by that would empty my letter box.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

If I needed money until payday, there are people who live close by who would lend me $5 for milk and bread.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

There is someone who lives close by that I could trust to look after my children if I needed to go out in a hurry.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I am happy with the amount of support I have in my neighbourhood.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

My neighbourhood is friendly and supportive of people who live there.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

If I needed help or advice about parenting I can think of at least three places I could go.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Can you name the places you would go? 1. 2. 3.

I enjoy being a parent.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I think I am a good parent.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I am good at listening to my child(ren) and hearing what they are saying				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I enjoy spending time with my child(ren)				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I often think about my child's(rens) feelings				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

When I am struggling with parenting, there are some skills or ideas I have that help me work things out				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I often find myself struggling with my child's (rens) behaviour				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

My friends / family are able to help me if I'm struggling with parenting				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please put it in the envelope provided to you and seal the envelope. The facilitator will collect the envelope off you.

Post course questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to fill out this questionnaire. If you have a question about any of the questions or statements in this form, please ask your facilitator to explain it.

Identifier (first two letters of your first name and first two letters of your birth month) Eg. Paul born in August is **PAAU.** This helps the researcher match up your questionnaires for the beginning and end of the BAP course. What is your identifier? .....
Why did you join the Being a Parent course?
What do you feel you got out of attending the Being a Parent Course?
What skills do you think a parent needs to feel confident with parenting?
How do you feel about yourself as a parent?

What do you think “good parenting” looks like?

Please circle which of the following is true for each of these statements like example below.

Please also feel free to add additional comments

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

There are people who live close by that I would trust to help me if I needed help.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

If I went away for a few days there are people who live close by that would empty my letter box.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

If I needed money until payday, there are people who live close by who would lend me $5 for milk and bread.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

There is someone who lives close by that I could trust to look after my children if I needed to go out in a hurry.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I am happy with the amount of support I have in my neighbourhood.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

My neighbourhood is friendly and supportive of people who live there.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

If I needed help or advice about parenting I can think of at least three places I could go.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Can you name the places you would go? 1. 2. 3.				

I enjoy being a parent.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I think I am a good parent.				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I am good at listening to my child(ren) and hearing what they are saying				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I enjoy spending time with my child(ren)				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I often think about my child's(rens) feelings				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

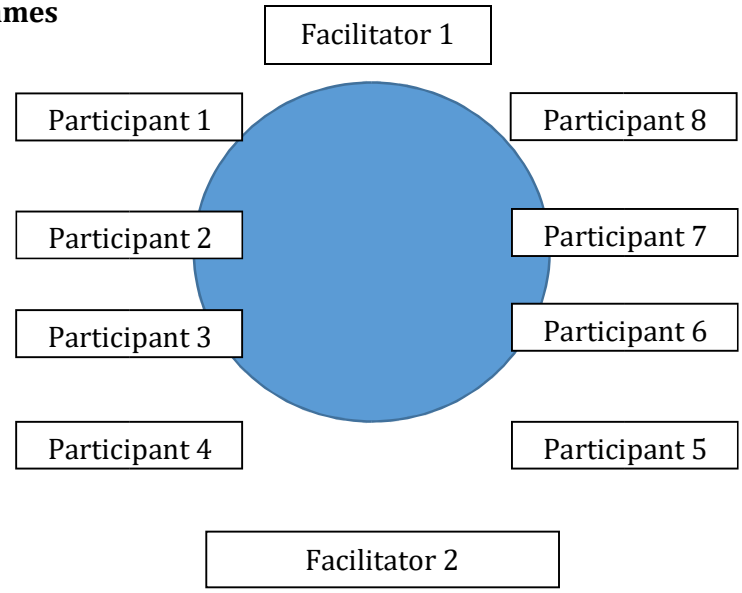
When I am struggling with parenting, there are some skills or ideas I have that help me work things out				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

I often find myself struggling with my child's (rens) behaviour				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				
My friends / family are able to help me if I'm struggling with parenting				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Any other comments?				

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please put it in the envelope provided to you and seal the envelope. The facilitator will collect the envelope off you.

Appendix 5: Observation proforma

Participant names



Date:

BAP Session:

Participant	Topic / issue	Notes / observations	(F1,F2)